WAAC

THE WOMAN'S STORY OF THE WAR

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This story of the War, written by a woman, is very timely, coming as it does after so many War novels, which only gave the man's point of view. In this volume we have the intimate story of a young girl during the same period, and in it she realistically describes her adventures and love affairs.

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ANONYMOUS

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

It was on the night of a dinner of the Old Comrades' Association in London last December (1929) that a very dear friend who had attended it and whom I had not seen for seven years—in this narrative I call her "Gwen"—said to me:

"Why don't you write your War reminiscences? They were so much more interesting and exciting than the experiences of most of us."

I told her that I had never written anything in my life.

"But I am sure you could," she replied. "You write such good letters."

I thought it over, and finally decided to see what I could do.

In the following pages I have avoided trying to harrow readers' feelings with gruesome descriptions of battlefield and war-hospital horrors, for that has been done already—in my opinion overdone. I have set down incidents amusing, pathetic, sometimes exciting and occasionally terrible, as I remember them and just as they come back to me. Names I have in most cases omitted—for an obvious reason. Unfortunately I kept no diary, so I cannot guarantee accuracy in dates and exact localities.

THE AUTHOR.

WAAC

THE WOMAN'S STORY OF THE WAR

CHAPTER I

"CONNIE, we are going into the war!"

I can see my old father still, standing there at the open door of the library with a peculiar expression in his eyes, an expression I had seen in his eyes only once or twice before. Once, when he had just heard that his sister had been killed in a railway accident near Shrewsbury. Once, when he had broken to us the news that he had lost heavily on the Stock Exchange.

He and I had always been such comrades, such confidants. Far closer confidants than he and my mother were. Perhaps because I was his only daughter and the youngest of the family.

My father was a parson living in a Rectory in the Midlands, six miles from the nearest town, and two from the little wayside railway station. My eldest brother was in the Navy. My second brother a lawyer in the Far East. Another, an actor of sorts in provincial touring companies. My youngest brother, an infantry subaltern—gazetted barely a year.

I was nineteen and had no occupation. I did nothing because my mother was old-fashioned (even for 1914), and considered it bad form, "unladylike,"

for a girl situated as I was to do anything. At least anything useful. My job was to marry. I suppose that had been my mother's " job " at my age.

My father came into the room, shut the door and sat down. Soon he got up and began to walk to and fro without speaking. I knew that when he did that it meant that he had something on his mind and was turning it over and didn't want to be spoken to. So I said nothing.

" I can't realize it, Connie," he said at last. " It is too frightful."

" The grocer said to me yesterday," I replied, " that in any case the war would be over in six months, so that even if we were dragged into it it wouldn't matter much."

" Damn the grocer ! " he exclaimed hotly. " That was what they said when the Boer War broke out— ' a punitive expedition that would be over by Christmas.' You shouldn't listen to what people of that sort say. They just foretell what they hope will happen."

My mother came in. She was one of those placid women whom nothing ever agitates, because they lack imagination. When my father told her the news her only comment was:

" Well, I suppose what must be must be. God knows best. I hope they won't send Henry out (Henry was my soldier brother), and that the Navy will keep out of it. The fighting will all be on the other side of the Channel, won't it? "

My mother was a good woman in the ordinary acceptation of that misbegotten phrase, and I am sure she did her best for us all according to her lights. But somehow she and I never hit it off. We were

so different temperamentally. Neither of us was to blame.

During the next fortnight or more I bicycled into the town every afternoon to try to find out what was happening, for the newspapers had all at once grown reticent. There were Union Jacks everywhere, and one met little parties of young men marching along the streets, often in their shirt-sleeves—the weather was intolerably hot—with sloped broom-sticks on their shoulders to represent rifles. They marched in step and looked flushed and excited.

But everybody was more or less excited, and many looked harassed. Everybody asked everybody else what was going to happen, and of course nobody could say. But on one point practically all the aborigines were unanimous. The war could not last long.

"Well, Miss Connie, and what are *you* going to do?"

I was reading a telegram stuck up in the post-office window when I heard a familiar voice at my elbow. The speaker was an old friend of my father's, one of the County people, with a nice place three miles from the town. He had taught me to ride when I was a tot, but since I had grown up had always called me "Miss Connie" in the old-fashioned way.

I turned to him, smiling. He was rather an old dear.

"Do?" I said. "I don't understand. There is nothing I can do—except, I suppose, knit socks and mufflers and help in jumble sales. That is what I am told all of us will be expected to do presently. Sit at home and knit while our men are fighting for us. It sounds heroic!"

But the old man was serious.

"You will have to do a great deal more than that before this war is over," was his answer, as he looked at me hard. "This is going to be a European war and it will last for years. Lord Roberts, poor old Bobs, one of my dearest friends, warned us long ago that it would come, and nobody believed him—people made fun of his prophecy. He and I were talking about it only the other day. But you—I thought you went through a course of first aid and nursing after you left school?"

"Yes, I did, but . . . ."

"But what?"

I felt embarrassed. It had not occurred to me to think that the course I had gone through might now prove of use. I knew that some girls of my age, and younger, as well as much older women, were volunteering to help in various ways. . . .

And then my mother. What would she say if I hinted that I would like to do something to help? The idea would shock her. As yet none of "the County" had enlisted as nurses or volunteered to do anything really useful. It had not become fashionable. It was a thing which as yet "wasn't done" by people like us. Later, of course, the illustrated weeklies became crowded with full-page portraits of Society women and County folk looking ravishing in their becoming nurse's uniforms.

"Lady A has joined the ranks of our Noble War Nurses."

"The Countess of B, who is nursing in Blank Hospital."

"Viscountess C, an indefatigable Red-Cross Worker."

And so on. But that time was not yet.

"Well?"

I looked up. The old man's kindly eyes were gazing into mine.

"You ought to do your bit, Miss Connie. You'll be made to later. Why not start at once? Why wait until all the stupid women who inhabit this county of ours agree that it is 'the right thing to do' just because they read in the newspapers that London Society has begun to bestir itself? If you would like to help in a hospital, for instance, I could help you with an introduction; I don't say they would make you a nurse at once, you might first of all be put to scrub floors and things. You needn't decide here and now. Just think it over when you get home, and if the idea appeals to you—ring me up. I know that your father would approve. What age are you?"

I told him.

He smiled. "Still, I dare say it can be managed."

My mother was distinctly antagonistic when the suggestion was made to her that I wanted to help in a hospital. It was my father who broached the subject on my behalf, and who argued with my mother that it was a thing I ought to do. In a month or two everybody—by which he meant all the County people—would be helping in one way or another, and so . . .

Later he took me aside.

"I have talked your mother round," he said. "And now I want to talk to you. As you know, Connie, I have not been a parson all my life—I sometimes feel I ought not to be one at all, as I was pretty much of a rolling stone years before you were born, and my outlook on life is rather a peculiar

outlook for a parson to have. Connie, of course you know that you are an exceptionally pretty and attractive girl—I talk to you quite frankly—and therefore you will need to be careful. Though I was never a soldier, after trading mules to our Government, in New Orleans, during the first year of the Boer War, I went on to Capetown, as I know I have told you before. From there I moved about a good deal in South Africa and saw much of what was going on—more than I ought to have seen. I saw more than a little of the women who went out there to become hospital nurses and what not, and some of them were pretty disgusting.

"And so it will be in this war, only probably more so, and I therefore want to put you on your guard. You will have to take the rough with the smooth, by that I mean mix with the good and the bad, and with your personal attractiveness you will for certain have plenty of the wrong sort hanging around you. Connie, for God's sake be careful. I know your temperament probably better than you yourself do. The men, too, that you will meet. War changes some men's natures completely, makes some of us beasts, at any rate for a time. You have seen little of the world, and nothing of a war world. You most likely think that all gentlemen, as we call them, the type of man you meet here in the hunting-field, are underneath what they appear on the surface to be. They most likely are—in peace-time. Yet in a war atmosphere they change—nearly all of them change. Even Henry I wouldn't trust. By the way, I have a telegram from him. He is coming here to-morrow for one night. Next week—well, next week he goes out to France."

I saw my father wince, and something seemed to clutch me inside. Yet of course we had both known that Henry would have to go. I suppose, however, we realized in that instant that this brief visit might mark his parting from us—for ever. I quickly changed the subject.

Henry arrived in the highest spirits. Like all the young subalterns at that time, he looked on the war merely as a great adventure. He could talk of nothing else. All he hoped was that he would get to France in time to see " something of the fun."

I wonder if young men have any sort of imagination? Though younger than Henry, I found it impossible to think of the war as anything but a horrible and stupid slaughter of human beings who could have no reason for hating or wanting to kill each other individually. Naturally I realized that England would, under existing circumstances, have been for ever disgraced had she decided to sit on the fence. But that realization did not make war seem more justifiable.

" What about Lionel? " Henry said suddenly. Lionel was our actor brother. " He'll join up, I suppose? ".

I said nothing for some moments. Lionel had written to me the week before saying that he could not possibly cancel his contract—his tour was due to continue for another seven weeks.

" You see, I am playing second lead," the letter went on, " and if Jones joins up, as he talks of doing, I shall step into his shoes, as I am understudying him. I can't afford to let slip such an opportunity for advancement and increased salary. The war can't last, everybody says so, so by the time

I had finished my training—if I enlisted—everything would most likely be over and peace have been declared . . ." and so it continued.

"Lionel has not yet decided what he will do," I lied. "He is on a good job, and good jobs are hard to get."

"To hell with good jobs!" Henry exclaimed. "Read that."

He fished a crumpled telegram out of his pocket and pushed it across to me. It was from our lawyer brother in the Far East:

"*Returning England immediately joining up.*
"Tom."

Henry spent most of the day with me—he was my favourite brother—and on the following morning I saw him off at the wayside railway station: he had parted from our parents at home.

Even after all these years I can remember that parting on the deserted little platform, and his last kiss. I believed I knew then that I should never see him again.

My father's old friend was as good as his word, and in less than a few weeks he rang me up to say that everything was arranged. I was to report as soon as possible at an address in London, which he gave me, and ask to see Lady G.

She was a tall, austere-looking woman of few words. She bowed slightly, pointed to a chair, and proceeded to ask me a number of pertinent questions.

"Say Yes, or No, nothing more," she said without looking up from the paper on which she was writing my replies. When she had finished she folded the paper, handed it to me, and said:

"Take that to——" she told me an address. "The matron there will see you. Good afternoon."

Not a smile. Not a kind word. I might have been applying for some lucrative post, instead of offering my services gratuitously and signing away my liberty for an indefinite period.

Not until long afterwards did I discover what a kind and gentle woman Lady G was, and that on the very day she interviewed me she had been notified of the death in action of her eldest son. Before the war was over she lost two more sons, the only two she had left.

I was sent to a hospital outside London and detailed to wash dishes. When I had been there less than a week I was ordered to wash a corpse—the first corpse I had ever seen. After that I was put in charge of some ducks and geese and young turkeys. In a few weeks' time I got orders to go to France.

In the boat several men scraped acquaintance with me. They were not in uniform, and I couldn't quite place them. They were extremely polite, however, and helped me with my hand baggage while we were landing. I was not wearing any uniform, so was astonished when one of them offered to give me a lift in his taxi to the address that I had told him I wanted to go to.

When we had gone a little way he called to the driver to stop.

"This is F——'s Bar," he said. "I have to see somebody here, but I won't keep you waiting more than a minute or two."

I had waited barely a minute when the man returned with two other men in mufti, one of them a Frenchman.

They raised their hats, and I felt the Frenchman's eyes literally glued on my face.

"You speak French?" he inquired in French.

I told him in French that I did.

"Will you get out and come this way, please?"

I began to feel uneasy.

"But why?" I asked.

"It is necessary," he replied in a sudden tone of authority.

Rather nervously I got out of the taxi. The Frenchman and his companion were talking in undertones. The man who had brought me had gone back into the bar.

They got one on each side of me.

"We have to cross the road," the Frenchman said.

"But my baggage," I exclaimed. "I can't leave it in the taxi unattended. It may be stolen. The driver may go off with it."

"The driver will not go off with it, Mademoiselle," was the prompt reply.

We walked about a hundred yards along the street, turned to the right, and went into an hotel. The Frenchman whispered something to the manager, who replied "*Parfaitement.*" Then the three of us entered the lift.

Some moments later we were alone in a small sitting-room.

"Will Mademoiselle please take off her hat?"

I took it off. By this time I was growing alarmed. Were they going to abduct me? I knew now that the polite stranger in the boat had not been polite for nothing. When offering me that lift in his taxi he had some definite reason for doing so.

The Frenchman's companion, a Jewish looking person, opened a large dispatch case which he carried, and produced from it an album. This he laid on the table and opened. It contained pages of photographic portraits, with writing under each.

When he had turned over several pages he stopped and put his finger on one of the photographs, and said: "This one."

I could see that it was the photograph of a woman.

The Frenchman pulled a small magnifier out of his pocket, scrutinized the portrait with it for some moments, then took a step towards me and began to examine my face with the magnifier.

Then he examined my ears and my throat and the back of my neck in the same way.

"*Tiens!*" he exclaimed, smiling for the first time. "*C'est drôle!*"

Yet apparently he was not completely satisfied, for he went on to ask me a number of questions—one or two were rather embarrassing questions. And then it suddenly dawned on me what was happening, or had happened.

I felt intensely relieved.

"May I see the portrait of my double?" I asked.

"*Mais non, Mademoiselle. C'est défendu.*"

And he shut the album.

After that both men were most polite. I had told them at the outset who I was and what I had come over for, and had offered to show them my papers. They had replied that they did not wish to see my papers. Now they begged me to join them in an *apéritif*, and thinking that if I did so it might help to cement the *entente cordiale*, I consented.

The Frenchman, whose manner had all at once

completely changed (from being a solemn official he had become a *bon camarade*) naturally grew flirtatious. I did not then know—though I quickly discovered—that a Frenchman can no more help trying to flirt with any woman who has a vestige of good looks than he can help eating his dinner when he is hungry.

CHAPTER II

THAT hospital at a French Base! It was a temporary affair consisting of one or two tents perched on a plateau on a hill some way out of the town. To reach it without a long *détour* one had to climb a very steep hill.

There were only seven nurses and the head nurse, who called herself "matron," though anybody less like a hospital matron I have never seen. She had hair of shining gold, very beautiful blue eyes, a most intriguing little *retroussé* nose, and a figure that I know the other girls—I beg their pardon, "sisters"—envied. Her age at most was twenty-four.

She received me with a smile and kissed me—so unlike Lady G's greeting!—and told me to sit down and have a cup of tea.

"Now tell me all about yourself," she said when we had talked commonplaces for some minutes. "Are you out here for fun, or are you one of the serious sort?"

I couldn't help smiling. I sized her up at once; yet there was something rather irresistible about her.

"I believe I am one of the serious sort," I answered. "Anyway, I haven't come to France for fun."

"They all say that," she laughed. "Tea sweet enough?"

I wanted to feel annoyed, but couldn't.

"Have you many patients?" I asked.

"I really can't tell you," she replied. "They come and go so. But there is one dear boy I am sure you will like. Such a baby. Got shot across the back while he was crawling on all fours to cut some wire. A fraction of an inch more and the bullet would have touched his spine. But you must not monopolize him, or you'll annoy the other sisters. They are all in love with him. He'll be going back to Blighty soon, I am afraid. Have another cup?"

Casually I mentioned that I had lately been through a first aid course and a course of nursing.

"Not really!" she exclaimed. "Why, that's splendid. I shall make you my 'second in command'!"

She touched a spring bell, and another girl came in. She was tall and dark and rather plain. But she had laughing eyes.

"Jones" (her name was not Jones), the matron said, "this is . . . I've forgotten your name."

I told her.

"Of course. Take her along, dear, and show her all that she ought to see."

Then she drew her aside and they spoke in undertones for a minute or two.

"Isn't she a scream?" the new sister said when we had gone out of the tent. "But we all love her. And she knows her job. Make no mistake about that. Did she tell you about the boy she is in love with, the one who got shot across the back?"

I said that she had.

"She would! Well, she's not the only one. You got a boy out here?"

"Boy?" I said, not understanding.

She laughed aloud.

"Fellow. Chap. Young man if you like."

"Oh, no," I said quickly. "I have only just come out."

"Of course. I didn't know. You've not had time. You'll find us a happy little family, not like some hospitals. Nobody nasty or catty or anything of that sort."

"Have you many wounded?"

"Let me see—about twenty to-day. Pretty bad, some of them. Two died yesterday and one this morning. You'll see them all presently. Tell me, dear, have you ever had a man? You look as if you hadn't, but you are so pretty I am sure you must have."

I admit that I was—well, to speak plainly, shocked. And I suppose I must have shown it (though I tried not to) because my companion laughed.

"No," she said. "I see you haven't. Well, each to her taste. I am not a Puritan myself, but I am not one of those who sneer at Puritans. I sometimes wish I was different, but one can't help the way one's made. And I was made like that."

We had been walking slowly, and now came to one of the other tents. In it were a dozen or so beds, all occupied. And the occupants seemed all to be boys, some of them almost children. Some were bandaged. One had his arms stretched straight out and bound to a strip of wood—he looked as if he were crucified. Yet he smiled up at us as we came along, and made some feeble joke.

"Poor lad, he has been like that over a fortnight," my companion said when we were out of earshot. "Everything has to be done for him, even to cleaning his teeth. Yet he never grumbles or curses his

luck, as some of them do. Wonderful, isn't it? And actually he is always cheerful. The M.O. thinks he may recover the use of his arms, but he isn't sure. There's nothing any of us wouldn't do for that boy. Bloody, I call it. But then it's a bloody war."

She introduced me to some of the other nurses. All were quite young, and friendly. Some of the things they said startled me, and some of their adjectives were astonishing. Yet under it all, I instinctively felt, lay sympathy and goodness and a determination to do their best to alleviate these poor fellows' suffering. Indeed I believe that not one of those girls, flighty and irresponsible as they were on the surface, would not have risked her life for any one of those wounded officers had it become necessary to do so.

To me it was all strange and very interesting. What, I wondered, would our respectable people at home have said or thought had they seen those girls as I saw them, or listened to their conversation? How horrified they would have been. I thought of my father and of my mother. My mother! I tried to picture my mother in my shoes in that hospital, but failed. I think she would have fainted. My father. Well, he was a man of the world, or had been. Though a *padre*, he would have understood and made allowances. But some of the young curates I had met at home, and some of those old rectors, and a bishop or two whose views I had heard expressed in my father's library—not one of them would have failed to condemn my new friends.

The duties of the sisters I soon discovered to be extremely uncongenial; yet they faced them without a murmur. There was only one orderly, and conse-

quently the nurses had to perform menial tasks—floor scrubbing, slop emptying and so on. In addition, most of the patients needed constant attention, and all beds had to be made before seven o'clock in the morning. Daily fresh victims arrived, and others were sent home to England.

Not very many of the menial tasks fell to my share, for which I felt supremely grateful. Only one person annoyed me, and that was the young M.O. From the day I met him first he began to cast sheep's eyes at me, a thing I hated. If only he had possessed the instincts of what is called a gentleman his company might have been endurable, but unfortunately such instincts were foreign to him. The nurses all disliked him—with one exception. Why she did not dislike him—or rather, why she put up with him—I discovered later. You will have gathered that these sisters and their matron were anything but prudes, yet even they disliked "funny" stories with no point in them but their filth. And in those stories this young M.O. specialized. He seemed to revel in them and had not intelligence enough to recognize how we all detested them. During the whole of the four years I served in France he was the only M.O. I met who behaved like that. Many made love to me, but none, fortunately, had minds like sewer rats or tried to show me odious photographs.

For quite a long time I stayed in that hospital. Canvas is a disagreeable thing to sleep under. In hot weather it is too hot and very stuffy. In cold weather it cannot be heated properly, so that all one's belongings get damp and remain so. The nurses all worked splendidly.

One day the matron sent for me.

"Darling," she said in a queer voice, "I am going to lose you. Everything is to be changed here. These tents are coming down and there is to be a new hospital. I am going somewhere up the line, I believe. You are to go to Rouen. Have you ever been there? Well, you will like it. But I shall miss you terribly. You have done so well and been such a help. And the sisters all like you, though sometimes they call you 'the little Puritan!' I wonder how long you will remain a Puritan? A parson's daughter, aren't you?"

I said I was.

"Clergymen's daughters," she laughed. "They are proverbially—but no, I mustn't shock you. My father was not a parson. He was a plumber. Fact. But a church-going plumber. That's why I went on the stage—I couldn't stick my father's pie, or what passes for pie. Then the stage fired me. Said I had no talent. Which is God's truth, for I haven't. There was a boy on one tour same name as you. Very hot stuff—not a bit like you."

"What was he like?" I asked quickly.

"The girls called him a swab, and that about sums him up. Rather tall. Fair. And talked in rather a funny way—not a stammer, you'll understand, but a kind of lisp. When he was playing he somehow lost it."

"Was he any good? I mean, could he act at all?"

"Pretty fair, so far as I remember. But why do you want to know? Have you met him? Is he a friend of yours?"

"Not exactly," I said. "He happens to be a brother of mine."

"Your brother! Oh, I am sorry. I'd not have said all that if I'd known. How extraordinary. You're not a bit like him. I suppose he is a soldier now."

I was ashamed to tell the truth, so I said that probably he was—by now.

The nurses had already told me that the matron had been an actress; though they didn't know what sort of actress. Musical comedy, they surmised, seeing what "a scream" she was.

It was a wrench parting from them all. I had enjoyed being with them. I had learnt from them a lot of things, too, which I had not before dreamed existed or could happen. The fly in the ointment had been the young M.O. On the single occasion when he had tried to kiss me I had slapped his face. He had tried to kiss each nurse in turn, I afterwards discovered, and received a slap from each. He must have had the hide of a rhinoceros.

When a weasel crosses your path bad luck is supposed to follow. What happens when a weasel runs over your toes? That was my experience the first night I slept in the hospital tent on the hill on the *rive gauche* of the Seine at Rouen. After that I made the tent weasel-proof so far as possible.

There could hardly be a greater contrast than the contrast which existed between the little temporary hospital which I had just left and the great hospital at Rouen, or rather row of hospitals. Run on strictly military lines, organized like a departmental stores, with a matron (or was she second in command?) whose acumen outrivalled that of any man I have ever

met—and I have been intimate with very clever men since those early war years—she was emphatically the Right Woman in the Right Place.

Nothing excited her. Nothing even flustered her. She could interview half a dozen people at the same time and not miss a point in any of their arguments. She spoke slowly and with deliberation, with a soft and very charming accent, was courteous to everybody—though some of the Brass Hats she had to deal with must have tried her patience sorely—and never forgot anything. She was one of those rare people who, if they tell you they are going to do a thing or see to something, will, you know for certain, do it or see to it at once. She ought to have been managing director of some commercial organization. Yet before the war, so I was credibly informed, she had been apprenticed to a hat shop in London's West End!

If the nurses where I had been knew how to enjoy themselves, those in Rouen knew how to work even harder—and by nurses I mean also the V.A.D.'s. To all intents they worked round the clock on the days when fresh convoys of wounded came down the line. And so did the M.O.'s, of whom I shall have more to say later.

The women were drawn from all ranks of the community. Shop girls, domestic servants of the better class, well-to-do girls and women who before the war had probably never done a stroke of work in their lives, women with titles, and many others mingled on the same social plane. How many there were I cannot say, but in that huge hospital camp there must have been at least a hundred, in addition to many male orderlies. There was friction, of course.

No mass gathering of that size composed almost wholly of women could have lived in complete harmony. The only thing which bored me was the incessant talk, the eternal chatter about men. I had a few officer friends in the town, and if ever I was seen with one of them, or it became known that I was going to lunch or dine with one or more of them, there was the inevitable remark with a meaning snigger—" Ah, *I* saw you ! " or " *We* know where you dined last night ! " or " Who's the lovely man you were with yesterday ? " and so on, followed by silly chaff.

CHAPTER III

In Rouen I had my first proposal of marriage. A Colonel. Actually.

He was only passing through Rouen, and looked about forty. He said he had a moor in Scotland and all sorts of other nice things; but somehow he didn't attract me, though he certainly knew how to make love. I was glad it was after I had refused him, and not before, that I saw him one night coming out of a well-known horrible establishment near the Rue Grosse Horloge. I suppose that according to the accepted standards of alleged morality the knowledge that he frequented a place of that sort should have made me reject him at once if I had not already done so. But it would not have. I had learned so much, grown so much wiser since I had quitted my father's sheltered Rectory, that an incident of that nature seemed hardly to matter. I had come to recognize the truth of my father's assurance that " war makes some men beasts, at any rate for a time."

It was soon after this that I was detailed to meet some of the trains arriving at Rouen with wounded from the casualty clearing stations. The sights one saw daily in the hospital were harrowing enough, but the spectacle of those trains packed with men, sometimes half cut to pieces, some of them with features mangled beyond recognition, upset me far more. Or would have done so had I allowed myself

to become upset. But a thing we nurses had quickly learned was never to betray our feelings. Some of our patients—I know this because some of them told me—imagined that we were hard and devoid of sympathy because we seemed to be so indifferent to their sufferings.

Indifferent! If only they had known! Often when alone after completing my duties I would cry my eyes out for quite a long time, and I know that other nurses did the same. But nothing would have induced us to let this be discovered if we could help it. The matron would have been down on us, too, telling us that we were not fit to be nurses—though I believe she was just as "weak" as any of us, had the truth been known.

At about this time I had a letter from my actor brother. The leading man in his company had joined up, and he, Lionel, was playing lead in some futile musical comedy. He wrote in high glee about this "bit of luck" as he called it, and his rise in salary; then went on to hope that I was "not having too rough a time among all those poor wounded devils." Then he explained at length how impossible it still was for him to join the army, adding that probably his company would later on come out to France "to give some shows for the fighting boys," so that after all he would then be "doing his bit . . . even though not actually fighting. We can't all do the donkey work, can we? And men like me are not fitted for that kind of thing—it isn't in our blood. . . ."

I rarely lose my temper, but that letter made me almost hysterical. "Horrible little swab," I remember exclaiming aloud. "If my mother were

not a virtuous woman I would swear he was a bastard got by some other father."

Then came another letter. My lawyer brother, Tom, who long before had come all the way from Hong Kong to do his bit, wrote that he had been accepted for the Kite Balloon Section. At last he had been given a commission, though three times the War Office had snubbed him when he applied for a job. I was not surprised to hear that, because I had heard so many temporary officers say the same thing. And it had always puzzled me. Middle-aged men—Tom was under thirty—gave up important posts because they felt they must try to help England in her great struggle. They went to the War Office, with or without an introduction, expecting to be metaphorically shaken by the hand and congratulated, and were met instead with a stony stare by some jumped-up official or jack-in-office who looked them up and down and then sometimes inquired superciliously "of what use they thought *they* would be in the army!" Later, of course, when men came to be badly needed, that attitude of the War Office gentlemen changed considerably. I don't speak from personal experience, naturally. But the officers who told me this were men whose statements I trust implicitly.

When I first arrived in Rouen the hospital nurses and sisters were granted much liberty. When off duty we could do just as we pleased without being questioned or interfered with. At that time if a nurse returned from the town after midnight, nobody said anything. But after a while some of the nurses began to abuse these privileges, and the crux came when one of them allowed an officer to motor her

into Paris in a Government car, which crashed into a French *camion*.

The usual inquiry followed, and all the hospital regulations were tightened up, and nurses had to be back in hospital by ten or eleven at night, or earlier. Then some silly girls were seen smoking cigarettes in a *café* one afternoon with several officers, and slightly inebriated. Noticed by Brass Hats, of all people. Again the hospital rules became stricter. One or two more ill-advised acts by foolish nurses and we all lost most of our privileges, and the hospital came to resemble a penitentiary, or rather a school for irresponsible children.

I liked nursing the men better than nursing officers, and I think that most of us did. The men were so obedient and so easy to manage, also they made no bones about expressing their gratitude—they rather overdid this sometimes and made one feel embarrassed. The officers—well, of course some of them were all right, but some emphatically were not, I mean those among them who were convalescent or nearly so. Their attempts at flirtation or openly making love were so crude, and some of their remarks so coarse. They seemed to think that because we were nurses we could be spoken to as though we were chorus girls; though why chorus girls should, when talked to like that, be expected not to take offence, I have never been able to understand. Some went so far as to order us about like servants.

"You know, my dear," a young captain said to me one day, "I was always given to understand that it was *infra dig* for a girl calling herself a lady to take on a job like yours. I wonder you do it. Why do you do it? Out to have some fun, I suppose—

expect to catch an officer and marry him, eh? Oh, don't try to bluff me! I know what you girls are after, particularly a pretty girl like you," and he gave a wink with an odious meaning in it. I had nursed him for ten days or more. Yet when he said that I could have hit him.

Nevertheless, what he said was not wholly without truth. I know that some of the girls and women who joined up so proudly did so chiefly in the hope of getting excitement and having a good time and meeting lots of "desirable" men, as they called them. This I know because some of them used to boast about it. Some of the Fashionable Society women who became V.A.D.'s when that had come to be "the right thing to do" (and not before), also wanted excitement. They would not have helped if only the middle classes had been helping. They got a thrill, too, through seeing their portraits in papers like the *Tatler* and the *Sketch*, with a caption (I think it is called) saying they had become "ardent war-workers somewhere in France," or something of the kind.

Not all the fashionable women were of that type, of course. Indeed some of them worked splendidly. Unfortunately, those who did not were the ones who got talked about and gave rise to the many stories told at the Bases about the Society nurses and other Society war-workers. That a cynic posted a notice above his bed, "I am too ill to be nursed," is probably untrue.

I hoped to remain a long time in Rouen, but one of the nurses—incidentally a well-known Society woman—having developed an unpleasant infatuation for me which I knew must lead to trouble if allowed to continue, I applied for a transfer.

"What's this I hear about your wanting to leave us?" a friendly M.O. said to me as we sat in the *Café* Victor one afternoon, sampling a new *apéritif* which he said he had just invented. "Why do you want to go? We like having you here, and you understand your job."

To explain would have been embarrassing, so I had to invent an excuse.

"The incessant rain here day after day and night after night gives me rheumatism," I replied. "They have good reason to call this town *le pot de Rouen.*"

"I wonder if I could persuade you to stay," he went on, after a pause. "If you go you will make at least one man miserable."

I gave him a quick look. Surely the old fellow—he was a senior officer aged about fifty-four—was not going to attempt love-making! I felt relieved when he continued:

"That good-looking boy in N ward who was shot near the groin is in love with you, what is called head over heels in love. He told me so—his father is a friend of mine, and I have known the boy since he first went to Marlborough, so he makes rather a confidant of me. He has a chance of recovery, but is in great pain at present, and mentally distressed as well. If you go you will lessen his chance of recovery, because he will worry so. If you stay, the fact of his seeing you every day will help his recovery. So what about it?"

I began to wish that I had been born with a face like a gargoyle. Say what you like, good looks are a handicap in the nursing profession. When patients are very ill they don't care what you look like. But when they begin to recover they either stare you out

of countenance every time you go near them (though too shy to say anything), or they set out to make love to you—and occasionally make odious propositions.

The lad in N ward, a subaltern not long from school, could at first do nothing but stare. I had felt him tremble while I dressed his wound, but supposed his trembling to be due to pain. On one of the few occasions when he had spoken he had told me that he did not care if he lived or died. He would be lame for the rest of his life, he knew, and, what was worse in his eyes, unable to ride. It seemed that before the war he had been a promising steeplechase rider—the only form of sport he cared about, he said.

That evening he said the same to me again—that he did not care if he lived or died. This time I was ready for him.

"Then I think you are very selfish," I replied, instead of expressing sympathy or trying to cheer him up. "My job here is to get you well. Do you suppose I gave up all my home amusements and comforts to come out to France just to see people die? I came out meaning to do my best to prevent any patient from dying who was put under my care. If you die I shall feel that I have failed, that my efforts to make you recover have been wasted. And you are a nice boy—I like you very much, really, perhaps more than you think. Wouldn't you like to do something to please me?"

His eyes brightened at once, and he smiled. The old M.O. had been right about his looks, though I had never particularly noticed them before. He put out his hand.

"I would do *any*thing for you, sister," he exclaimed with burning eyes. "Tell me what you want."

"I want you to try to recover, to make up your mind that you *will* recover—for my sake. Besides, if you let yourself die—there is no reason why you should die, you are not mortally wounded—it will mean a black mark for me. The M.O. and the matron and everybody else in authority here will think, and perhaps say, that if I had attended to you better you would not have died, that it was owing partly to my negligence . . ."

"Look here," he interrupted, "don't talk like that. You know as well as I do that nobody could have nursed me better than you have, or been kinder, or—or . . ."

"Then you will try? You'll never say again that you don't care if you die?"

"I promise I won't. I swear it. I'll get well just to show you—just to please you. . . ."

Then, carried away for an instant by his emotion, he put up both arms.

"Sister, I wish to God you'd kiss me! I've been wishing it ever since I first saw you. Just once. Won't you?"

It was almost dark, and a screen hid part of the ward. I glanced to right and left, then bent down and kissed him several times—on the lips. I felt his whole body thrill. I know that during those brief moments his pain was forgotten. When I straightened myself again there were tears in his eyes.

"*You darling!*" I heard him whisper.

Was it a mean trick, seeing that I didn't love him, though I liked him well enough? I think not. For

it had the desired effect. From that day onward he was quite a different person. He told me that now he had something to live for, also that apart from that he was determined not to " let me down " by letting himself die.

Some weeks later he was invalided home, and from home he wrote to me almost every day. In one of his last letters he told me that though lame he was to be sent up the line again.

A month after that I read that he had been killed in action.

The news should have given me a shock. If any friend of mine were killed to-day in any sort of accident I should feel terribly upset. But somehow during the war death did not seem to count. One's sensibility seemed to be blunted—atrophied. One danced with a man to-night, and a few nights later he would be brought in on a stretcher. Next day he would be dead. Yet one didn't grieve. Perhaps one had not time to grieve. Or one didn't think. The only way to ensure any sort of peace of mind during the war was never to think.

" You are no good at any war job if you start thinking," a sniper said to me one day, with a laugh. " I discover a Boche through my glass, and cautiously raise my rifle and draw a bead on him and fire and see him crumple up—if I am lucky. If before firing I began to ponder, wonder who the fellow was, what his occupation in civil life had been, if he had wife and children and a happy home, and then pictured to myself his wife and children receiving the news of his death, and reflected that all that misery would be owing to me—well, I couldn't pull the trigger, I just couldn't. Besides, I might be all wrong. The

man might be some unconscionable rogue, or a blighter who beat his wife and neglected his children, or he might be a hopeless drunkard or an unspeakable blackguard. And if I didn't kill him he would, as likely as not, kill me and so—well, there you are: shoot first and shoot quick, that's my motto."

A thing which always disgusted me—I came across a good deal of it later on when driving an ambulance—was what the soldiers used to call "booby tricks." A broken-down lorry would be set like a trap with a bomb or some explosive, and then left. When the enemy came upon it and began to try to move it they would, of course, pull the lever. Instantly the bomb would explode and the men all be blown to pieces, or at any rate killed. Another booby trick consisted in half-starving a prisoner and then giving him a tin of preserved meat into which air had been admitted so that the meat had gone bad. Ravenously the poor wretch would devour the meat, and a little later he would die in agony. I don't say who did that sort of thing, we or the Boches, or if both did it. All I say is that it was done.

"All is fair in love and war." I should like to see the man who invented that slogan flogged to death. He is to blame for unutterable horrors.

A more mixed set of men I have never come across than the officers in the Great War; and since the Armistice I have travelled in many countries and met all sorts and kinds of men, also women.

About two gentlemen to every five who were not gentlemen I should say was approximately the average. And by gentlemen I don't mean necessarily public school men or the sons of the nobility or the aristocracy. There were gentlemen—Nature's gentle-

men—drawn from all classes—shop assistants, clerks, manual labourers and so on. I remember a little man who had been shot through both cheeks telling me that from the age of fourteen he had had his nose to the grindstone in a boot repairing shop. He had never had an opportunity to play any games or indulge in those forms of sport which are supposed to—and undoubtedly do—help to "make a man" of young men by giving them self-confidence, courage, a sense of fair play, and rendering them indifferent to risks and hard knocks. At eighteen he had enlisted in a line regiment. So efficient did he prove himself to be, and so regardless of danger, also so cool-headed in moments of crisis, that within eighteen months he was promoted sergeant-major, and nine months later granted a commission. The things he had done were told to me by a friend of his in the same ward—twice he had saved lives at the risk of losing his own, and on each occasion he had been wounded. But these acts of gallantry had been overlooked—as so many hundreds of acts of gallantry were—so he got no special decoration. He was one of the most considerate patients I nursed at any time during the war, and his father had been no higher in the social scale than under-keeper on a country gentleman's estate.

By contrast I recollect a rather dreadful person, a very rich man, who for twelve months early in the war was a M.L.O. (Military Landing Officer) at a Base. I can see his portly figure and red face still as he strutted up and down the quay in his brass hat, cursing everybody when he didn't damn them, and doing all he could to display his tin-pot authority. If troops about to land happened to be singing, he would bellow at them to desist, and put one or two

under arrest if they failed to stop at once. Dogs were not allowed to be landed—many of the men loved dogs and used often to try to smuggle them into France—and any dog found by him was at once thrown into the river.

That man "carried on" up and down that quay every day for a year, or perhaps rather longer. The only shells he ever saw were those being off-loaded from the ships. The only shells he ever heard explode exploded one hundred or more miles away and were only occasionally audible. Yet eventually he was awarded a D.S.O. and went home to England. Before the war I had looked upon holders of a D.S.O. with a sort of awe, and considered them to be all heroes. The war dispelled that illusion.

One matron under whom I served bore a striking resemblance to some of those Pompous Persons. I must not mention which hospital she was in, for even after a lapse of years the arm of the libel law can strike. It was a hospital for "other ranks," and among the patients was a man of over sixty who, whilst driving a lorry of ammunition up the line, had been blown up and blinded in one eye. He was dreadfully depressed, not so much at the loss of his eye as through disappointment at his being no longer able to carry on. After remaining a week almost in silence he ventured to make some feeble joke.

"Stop that, please!" snapped the matron. "You are not expected to be funny in a Red Cross hospital."

The old fellow collapsed. And I never heard him speak again.

CHAPTER IV

After my time in Rouen I was transferred temporarily to Abbeville, about sixty miles north-east of Rouen, and nearer to the danger zone. I had remained in Rouen because the Society nurse who had bothered me had been transferred elsewhere.

Before that I had been home on leave, and what I had seen at home had disgusted me.

For quite a large section of the people one met seemed to be only dimly aware that a war was in progress. Young men, many of whom one suspected must be fit to serve, were everywhere. Foolish women and girls amused themselves by pushing white feathers into the hands of these men indiscriminately. As a result, men quite unfit to serve were shamed into enlisting, while others, fit to serve, laughed at the women or insulted them.

A friend of mine, a young solicitor, whose health and constitution were extremely poor, driven half frantic by these white-feather cranks, applied for a commission. Almost immediately he was sent to France. In a few months he was dead.

Then, I found that in England some unintelligent person had coined a shibboleth, "Business as usual," hoping thereby to prevent panic, forgetful of the fact that the British Nation has never been known to panic. Consequently people tried more and more to forget there was a war, while devoting their energy to seeing how much money they could make during

the war. And what fortunes some of them amassed, had already amassed when I went home on leave!

It was amazing. Two acquaintances of mine in the imported meat trade made no pretence of hating the war. They told me openly that they "hoped it would last for years and years." Both were of military age and appeared to be in the best of health —though they may not have been. But they might at least have refrained from expressing their joy so freely.

A phrase one heard parroted on all sides was, "There's a war on." I think it started in the music-halls, still cesspools of slushy sentimental patriotism and blatant cock-suredness. One song in particular, bawled everywhere, began with the line, "It's a fine thing to see them marching away . . ." and ended with something about missing them during their absence and kissing them on their return. Most unappetizing young women sang it in the halls, and fearsome females screeched it at charity concerts and other "in-aid-of" entertainments to raise funds to buy cigarettes or socks or shirts or woolly comforters for "the dear boys."

"There's a war on" became an excuse for every sort of inattention, inefficiency, carelessness, slackness and even rudeness. If an order given to a shop were not attended to, a supercilious assistant would shrug his shoulders and tell you "There's a war on." If complaint were lodged about a parcel lost in the post, the pert female would retort, "Perhaps you forget there's a war on." It was the same everywhere.

One of the first of my acquaintances I met on arriving in London on leave exclaimed with a little

cackle of laughter, "Had a good time, darling? I suppose *you* know there's a war on!"

Then she went on to gush about all she had been doing, the fun she had been having, and how, after all, "though of course war must be horrid," it had its compensations.

"Had a good time?" How often that was said to me during that fortnight's leave, and how it enraged me. Good time! Good God!

Sometimes I tried to tell them about the scores of poor fellows one had tended in the hospitals; but they hardly listened. Or if they did it was only to try afterwards to cap what one had told them by relating what they themselves had been doing in the way of war "work" at home—singing at concerts, playing in amateur theatricals, attending work meetings, organizing balls, collecting in the streets on flag days, writing letters to soldiers at the front—in the hope, of course, of getting exciting or affectionate replies.

Back in my old home in the Midlands for a few days, I found my mother as placid as usual.

"Well, have you enjoyed yourself, dear?" was her first remark after kissing me on the forehead. "You must tell us all about what you have been doing and how you liked it and what the war is really like. I hear from Lionel sometimes. He has been out there too, you know, with his company, 'doing his bit,' as he says, though of course he can't fight. Last week he wrote and told me of the wonderful success his 'show,' as he calls it, had up quite near the front line. He could hear the fighting quite well, he said, and it thrilled him and . . ."

That was more than I could bear. Had my father not cut in at that moment I don't know what would

have happened. My father was so tactful, seemed always to know exactly what was passing through my mind. He looked sadder, older, than when I had seen him last. Once when we were alone together he said to me quite simply:

"Connie, never forget that you can always tell me *everything*—though I am a parson."

I knew so well what he meant, what was in his mind. Later I had reason to thank God I had a father who "understood." If more fathers (and mothers) "understood" their daughters, how much less domestic misery there would be. But most of the girls I have met would rather die than reveal certain secrets to either of their parents; naturally, because if they did reveal them their parents would most likely turn them out into the street.

And parsons too. How strange many of them are. How lacking in imagination and comprehension. While on leave I went to see a nurse friend in a Red Cross hospital in London. I remembered she had been with me in Rouen when I went there first. It was a Sunday morning, and she told me that the "minister" from some church was to hold a short service in the main ward—he was just due to arrive. Would I mind attending the service too, as she would be compelled to?

After the service the minister said he would address a few words of consolation to the patients, all of them wounded officers. This he did by telling them in the course of his talk that their wounds came as a punishment for their sins, and that they might take it for granted that "the worst wounded among you have been the greatest sinners. . . ."

This remark evoked splutters of laughter from

many of the beds, and even "the greatest sinners" found it possible to smile grimly. When this Job's comforter had taken his departure the ward burst into loud laughter—all but the nurses, who were furious and expressed themselves very freely indeed—and their opinion of the minister. I don't think I had ever before or have ever since seen women quite so enraged. When I told my father about it he said things about some of his colleagues which were peppery and to the point.

I had looked forward to that fortnight's leave. But I was glad to get back to France. The smugness and the apathy and the lack of imagination of many of our people at home had made me feel uncharitable. They seemed to be unable to realize what was actually happening in France, and that the war was likely to last a year longer at least. And those ghouls making fortunes out of it—enjoying it! If only a few thousand Boches could effect a landing and show our people what war was really like, what a lot of good it would do, I thought. Even I had not yet seen more than the fringe of its horrors. I was soon to see more than the fringe.

Women always gossip, though they don't gossip more than men. Before two days had passed after my arrival at Abbeville I knew a lot about most of the senior officers stationed there, and about their *amours*. I also quickly learned that there had been some scandal regarding a young nurse whom I had been detailed to replace. I was not told her name, or any particulars.

But a day or two after that a note was brought to me. For some moments I could not think who it came from. Then all at once it dawned on me. I

read the note again carefully. The writer gave an obscure little *estaminet* as her address, and begged me to come to see her.

Nurse T! The nurse in the Base hospital who had shocked me by asking me if I had "ever had a man."

I was shocked now—this time by her appearance. It had completely changed. I had to look at her hard for some moments.

Her face was drawn. Her arms were thin. Her eyes had an anxious, frightened expression. The little room she was in smelt unpleasant.

"You are a darling to come," she said, getting up out of her chair with some difficulty as I came into the room. "I heard you had been sent for to take my place. . . ."

I was puzzled. Then light began to dawn.

"Take your place?" I said. "I had no idea I was taking your place. I didn't know even that you were not still at the Base where we first met."

"Then you don't know . . ."

"I don't know anything definite, but in the hospital here I have heard rumours—gossip."

"True gossip this time," she replied. "Well, it's no use crying now. I have been a fool, and what I have got I deserve."

"It doesn't show much—yet," I said with a quick glance at her figure.

"But quite enough to reveal the secret. Oh, what a bloody fool I have been!"

"Who was it? An officer, I suppose?"

She shook her head.

"Not a Tommy?"

"No."

"Not one of the *alliés*, surely—the sacred *alliés!*"

"Oh, no."

"Then who on earth . . ."

"Sit down here, darling, and listen to me. I hardly dare tell you, yet I feel I must. It was not a soldier."

"Not a soldier? But there are only soldiers here."

"An actor. English."

"An actor! My word, what a cur! A soldier might possibly be forgiven—even you might forgive him. . . ."

She hid her face in her hands and began to cry.

"I can't tell you. Oh, I can't! I can't!"

"You must tell me. Tell me everything," I urged. "You surely don't think I should talk. Who was he? What was he like?"

She stared at me out of tear-dimmed eyes.

"You'll never forgive me. But mind—it was my fault. All my fault."

I went on pressing her to tell me, wondering why she should think it could matter to me who the man was. Finally she leant forward and whispered a name.

I can stand a good deal, but I confess that when she said that I really did see red. Lionel! He had been in France with his acting troup, that I knew. And —and—he had scraped acquaintance with Nurse T in St. Omer, and there, two days later, it had happened. I felt I wanted to strike out. My brother. My rotten brother who hadn't the grit to fight for his country had nevertheless been "doing his bit in France," as my mother had said. His bit! God!

"Don't turn on me, Connie," I heard a piteous voice saying. "I swear it was my fault. I saw he

was attracted by me and I encouraged him—somehow I attract men, though I am so plain. And when I see that a man is like that I can't help egging him on. I don't know why. I have done it as long as I can remember—it must be a mental kink, call it madness if you like. But I liked you so much the first time we met, and then came to look on you as a real friend, and then when I heard that you were to take my place here after I had been dismissed, ordered home, I thought it would be only fair that you should know the whole truth."

I couldn't say much. I felt too much upset, too furious with my brother. Not with this poor girl. The attitude she had adopted, her fear that I would "turn on her," was pathetic. I reassured her on that point.

"And what are your plans now?" I asked at last.

"I haven't any. I don't know what I shall do, for I have hardly any money."

"Do your people know?"

"My people! Heaven forbid! That is the difficulty. I can't go home in the state I am in, and I don't know where to go. My people are middle-class folk living in Surbiton, and if they knew I was in trouble—in this way . . ."

She didn't finish, but began to sob again. It was then that a thought came to me.

"Perhaps I could help you," I said. "I have an idea."

She brightened.

"I think my father might help you."

"Your father? I thought your father was a parson."

"He is, but . . ."

"Oh, don't. No parsons for me. I had enough of parsons at home."

"Listen," I said almost angrily. "My father is not like other parsons—not like any *padre* I have ever met or heard of. I will tell him what has happened—and exactly how it came about. I won't mention my brother, because the knowledge would upset him so. My father will help you to get through this business without any of your people or anybody else knowing or suspecting. He is like that. He knows what human nature is. If more *padres* were like him the world would be a happier place to live in."

Impulsively she got out of her chair, and came over and kissed me.

"You *are* an angel!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe there is another woman like you in the world! I only wish I could show my gratitude."

We went on talking for a little while, and then I left her. That night I wrote to my father.

Abbeville was an uninteresting place, and I was glad to be sent to Amiens after two months. I was gradually getting nearer to the danger zone, and I remember thinking how curious it was that the nearer one approached the danger zone the more friendly, or "matey"—to use the ugly modern word—everybody became. The "atmosphere" of Amiens was different from that of Abbeville, and very different from the Rouen "atmosphere."

For instance, in Rouen if a subaltern had the effrontery to wish a senior officer good morning before the senior officer condescended to wish him good morning, unless the senior officer were a very exceptional person he would "tick off" that presumptuous

subaltern severely. Not so in Amiens. There I many times saw subalterns commit that gross breach of discipline, or whatever it may be, and the senior officer always responded quite pleasantly. Again, in the first Base I had been stationed in, and in Rouen or Abbeville, you would never see a subaltern alone in the company of a major, less still in the company of a colonel. If a colonel or a major invited a subaltern to a meal in a restaurant, there would always be a third person present who was of higher rank than subaltern. But at Amiens it was no unusual thing to see a subaltern and a captain or a major or a colonel lunching together alone, and I don't think that anybody thought the less of the superior officer for being "matey" with his inferior—in rank.

I had learnt how to drive a car. Two of the drivers had taught me, and I had gradually become fired with ambition to give up nursing and become a driver—an ambulance driver if possible.

Nursing was all very well, but it had never really appealed to me. One had all the time to keep one's feelings under such strict control, and that I found extremely difficult. And naturally it would never have done for nurses to have betrayed any sort of emotion. Even in the French hospitals any emotional display on the part of a nurse was at once sternly suppressed.

For the first time I understood how those lads at home felt who "wanted to see some of the fun."

Fun! I was to see more of it than I wanted.

Influence was of great use during the first two years of the war, though of less use later on. I wrote to Lord Carrick, whom I had seen at the Deptford Cattle Market whilst on leave. He was directing supplies

and transport there, and I remember seeing him in his shirt-sleeves hustling great packing-cases one day when there was a rush, to the intense astonishment of the civilian labourers and dock hands employed.

"Fancy 'is Lordship doing a thing like that!" I recollect one of them exclaiming to another; and both appeared to be rather shocked that "the Earl," as they called him, should so debase himself! Lord Carrick's sister, Lady Kathleen Lindsay, was in charge of some hundreds of girls employed in packing rations, and I had been told that the War Office thought highly of her ability, and that the women's organizations would do almost anything she asked. I had seen her in the hunting-field in Ireland, too, on more than one occasion in pre-war days.

But I got a nasty snub. My letter found its way to some subordinate, who wrote curtly that I had no business to write to Lord Carrick, that I ought to have applied to my C.O., or to some women's organization —I forget which—if I wanted to drive an ambulance.

Letters took a long time to reach their destination, or perhaps the "Passed to you, please," many times repeated, was the reason why replies were so long delayed. So, while waiting impatiently, I carried on in two hospitals, where more and more wounded came pouring in. A case which upset me considerably was that of a lad who was led in one day with both hands blown off. He had come out from England only a few weeks before, he told me while I was nursing him, and in civil life had been an experimental chemist, or rather apprenticed to one. He had invented a bomb which he considered to be an improvement on the Mills bomb, and hoped that

the War Office would adopt it if it proved satisfactory in the field. Some of these bombs he had brought with him surreptitiously, and almost the first he threw, or tried to throw, blew his hands off. He was almost in tears when he told me all this "in strict confidence," and seemed to be less upset at losing his hands than at the failure of his invention.

"My people are frightfully hard up," he ended, "and I thought I should make a fortune for them with these bloody bombs."

He stared at me very hard when I smiled at this remark, then, to my amazement, blurted out:

"Nurse, you are frightfully pretty! I wish to God I hadn't lost my hands so that I could touch your hair. I have rotten luck all round. Won't you let me kiss you?"

Such a lot of patients seemed to want to be kissed —kissed even by nurses who were quite plain. But then so many of them were almost babies. I suppose that kisses reminded them of home and of their mammies. The old men who wanted to be kissed mostly revolted me. Horrible old satyrs. I think there are few things more odious than dried-up old men who leer at and ogle you and finally try to paw you. They have no control over their feelings; at any rate they had none during the war. I had experiences which even now make me almost shudder when I think of them. Of course the war was to blame. It made some men sexually mad.

CHAPTER V

I KEPT no diary or notes during the war, unfortunately, so what I write is only what I can remember—incidents which crowd in upon me in quick succession.

One afternoon somebody knocked at my door. The nurse who came in had been in France only a few weeks, and from the first had seemed to take a fancy to me—or so I thought.

"I expected to find you having tea," she said, "and I am dying for a cup. I hope you don't mind my butting in uninvited?"

For a little while we chatted about nothing in particular, and then suddenly she remarked:

"Didn't I hear you say last week, B——, that you are hard up?" Christian names were rarely used.

"I don't remember saying so," I answered, "but as I generally am hard up I dare say I did. Who did I say it to?"

"I forget. But that doesn't matter. It struck me afterwards that perhaps I might help you to—to become less hard up, and that is partly why I have come here now."

Astonished, and rather puzzled, I asked her to explain.

"Your father is a parson, isn't he? And so I suppose he has a big family."

I told her the truth.

"I have five brothers and four sisters," she said, smiling. "But we are not hard up. Rather the other way. You see, my father is a financier."

"Oh, in the City."

"Well no, not exactly. In Shepherd's Bush. That's where his office is. We live in Putney."

"I see," I said, beginning, as I thought, to get her meaning. "And you think your father might put me on to a good thing or two—tell me what shares to buy, and so on."

For an instant she looked embarrassed.

"I didn't mean that—exactly. He isn't a stock-broker, you understand. He advances money."

"Oh, a money-len . . ." I checked myself.

"So if you are pressed for money, dear," she went on, pretending not to have heard, "I thought that perhaps you would like me to speak to him about you —I am sure he would make you an advance on your note of hand if I asked him to. He is ever so good that way."

I did not know whether to be annoyed, or treat the thing as a joke, or stand on whatever dignity I possess, and thank her coldly while declining the offer. I had met many sorts of women since the war started, but this was my first experience of a money-lender's daughter.

"It is very thoughtful of you," I said after some moments' hesitation, "but I couldn't think of letting you take all that trouble on my account. Why should you?"

"Because," she answered with delightful candour, "my father allows me a commission on people I

bring to him who want financing—that is, if anything comes of the introduction. So you would be doing me a good turn."

She said this with such *naïveté*, was so obviously unable to see the humour in her suggestion, that I almost laughed. A hospital nurse out to do her bit, doing a bit at the same time for her father and a bit for herself! . . .

Later I discovered that she had made the same proposal to several of the other nurses. And she had confided to one of them that her brother was a bâtman who used to lend money to the officer he looked after! Had that officer been one of the wrong sort he could, of course, have placed the man under arrest and avoided repaying the loan!

I was still a V.A.D., for no order for my transfer to the ambulance corps had yet come through. The more I saw of wounded men, their courage and their patience, the more my admiration for men, as a body, grew. Would women have borne those frightful wounds with as much fortitude and so few complaints, I asked myself? True, women endured the agonies of child-birth with wonderful fortitude; but the pain of child-bearing, though no doubt intense, lasted for hours only—not for days and weeks and sometimes months.

Though I had many women friends, women, considered collectively, had never greatly appealed to me. Since I had been in France I had been afforded opportunities of studying my sex at close quarters and in great variety, and the study interested me because the nurses varied so greatly in type and temperament. I came to the conclusion, after

careful consideration, that all women, or practically all, may be divided into two groups—the sexual and the non-sexual. There were nurses in the different hospitals I was in who would no more have allowed any man even to squeeze their hand than they would have let him come into their bedroom. Many of these nurses were quite young, and when watching them I sometimes wondered if they were any the happier for being so cautious—so prudish.

The sexual woman, I regret to have to admit, I found to be more sympathetic, more pleasant and companionable, more "human," though it ought, of course, not to have been so. Some of the girls who had been Girl Guides were exceptionally efficient—but what hard, unyielding natures they seemed to possess; what an atmosphere of militarism and red tape they exhaled! Quite as it should be, no doubt; but they were rather difficult to get on with. For when we women try to conduct ourselves exactly as though we were men and possessed the male mental outlook—as, I feel convinced, many of those ex-Girl Guides did—we almost always overdo it. We become what I have heard men call "hard-bitten."

Women who astonished me were the suffragettes who helped in the war. When the suffragettes had been chaining themselves to railings and setting houses on fire and biting policemen I had been in my early teens. At that time I had believed them all to be what my mother used to call "an utter disgrace to our sex." In France I met them in dozens in the hospitals and canteens and Y.W.C.A. and Y.M.C.A. huts, and elsewhere, and they were

quite different from what I had imagined. Self-reliant, calm, capable, they got through their work quickly and without fuss. And they, too, were "human"—I can think of no better word. Perhaps those I met had not been militant, but they had been suffragettes of some sort. Their argument, I remember, was that as a rule you can't get much done in this world unless you make yourself an intolerable nuisance, and I believe that up to a point that is so.

At Amiens one could hear the guns rumbling at intervals, and the sound stirred something in my blood. I detested this war, had detested it from the first, yet when one came within sound of it . . .

I can't analyse what it was that then began to draw me, made me want to get closer still to the scene of activities. Other nurses told me that the sound of the guns affected them like that too. So I put in another application for transfer to the ambulances. I wanted to go forward. I felt I must go forward and see just what was happening away over there beyond the skyline. One seemed to become possessed by some sort of restrained excitement; obsessed by what may have been a kind of morbid curiosity.

I forget the name of the place where for the first time I saw shells bursting. They were a long way off—just puffs of white smoke which seemed to remain stationary for a minute in the still air and then gradually fade into nothingness. The driver of the ambulance turned to me:

"Frightened?" she asked.

It was not fright that had made my mouth go dry,

I think. Rather it was excitement. I was on my way to bring back a Very Important Personage who had fallen seriously ill, and an hour or so later we came to a spot where a number of mules were lying dead. A.S.C. drivers stood examining them, while a sergeant-major made notes in a little book.

My driver stopped to ask what had happened. Then we saw that the mules all had their hoofs missing. They had not been killed by shells. One big shell had burst near them and blown off all their hoofs and the drivers had put them out of their agony with a revolver, we were told.

"Fifty or sixty quid apiece them hanimals cost," the sergeant-major remarked morosely.

An airplane hummed high in the air, a long way off. The sergeant-major scanned the blue sky with his field-glass. Presently I saw the thing—a speck almost invisible and apparently exactly over our heads.

"A Boche plane," he said calmly. "We'll be getting it again presently. You'd better go that way, miss," he added to my driver, pointing. "Eight or ten miles 'll make you quite safe, I shouldn't wonder. But it's a bad road, miss—bad surface."

Beautiful men, the men you hear people say "all women run after," also very young men, never greatly interested me even when I was nineteen. Most men are easily spoiled, and my experience of exceptionally good-looking men is that the majority become conceited and occasionally patronizing, while youths are either very shy and therefore difficult to make conversation with, or too self-

opinionative and cock-sure. The men who attract me most, and always have, are " natural " men. They may be good-looking—generally they are not—but always they are considerate and courteous and gifted with a sense of humour and amusing to talk to, particularly if they have travelled much and mixed with all sorts of people. Above all they don't talk to impress one, or pretend to be what they are not.

Rupert C was that type of man. A.D.C. to the Important Personage whom I had come to retrieve, he attracted me at once. He had a nasty scar across his chin—he told me afterwards that he had cut his chin while shaving! But of course I knew that he lied. It was a shrapnel wound recently healed.

" I'll show you where you two will have to sleep," he said on the night we arrived; then conducted us to the only tent visible in the darkness. " It's the best I can do for you—but (he smiled) it has got a looking-glass! "

Not until daylight came did we discover that he had given us his bed and his tent and slept in the open wrapped up in a blanket!

Never before had I felt drawn towards any man as I was towards Captain C. That he looked rather hard at me I will allow, but not once that day or on any of the occasions when I met him afterwards did he attempt to become flirtatious. Always even-tempered, always cool and collected and "on the spot," he seemed to be as efficient at his job as he was considerate and unselfish. Later I was told that his men would do anything for him, and that did not surprise me.

During the time he remained in Amiens the knowledge that he was so near affected me strangely. Particularly at night, thoughts of him came to me —obsessed me. Until then I had always fallen asleep almost as my head touched the pillow; but now it was different. For an hour or two I would lie awake—thinking. And it was always only Rupert of whom I thought and of whom I dreamed. I tried to pull myself together. I told myself it was nothing more than foolish infatuation that I suffered from. Something seemed to keep on dinning it into my brain that at last I had really fallen in love, a condition I had always laughed at and never believed possible in my case. Passion, yes. I knew what it felt like to feel passionate. But that was quite another thing. Many of the girls I knew intimately had admitted that they were of passionate temperament. That nurse who had got herself into trouble I knew to be passionate almost past belief. But love! One read about it in books. One talked about it. One laughed and joked about it. A friend of mine had only recently wearied me with a description of the love she felt for some man or other, and I had tried to listen patiently, and now . . .

The crisis came when one of the sisters said to me one day:

"What's wrong with you, B——? Why are you so thoughtful, so absent-minded? You never used to be. I believe you are in love!"

I turned upon her. What I said I can't remember, but it made her cut me dead from then onward. Then one day I got a blow.

"On Monday I am being moved," Rupert said

to me. We were dining together in a little *estaminet*. "They are sending me to Albert to rejoin my Company."

For several moments I couldn't speak. Nor could I look at him, though I felt his eyes upon me. At last I made an effort.

"I have been to Albert," was the only thing I could think of saying. His face was a blur when I tried to look at it. I knew that he must be noticing how wet my eyes were.

We were alone. He twisted himself round in his chair, to make sure that the door was shut. A moment later he stood behind me where I sat.

He had my face between his hands, his lips pressed my hair.

"Connie," he exclaimed, "Connie—haven't you realized?"

His voice had trembled.

"What do you mean?" I forced myself to ask.

"You are so different from all the women I have ever met. Lots of men have proposed to you, I suppose, but—but . . ."

"The only man who ever proposed to me was old enough to be my father," I said quickly.

"You don't know anything about me. . . ."

"And don't want to. . . ." I could hardly speak. "I thought you were indifferent to me—dear. I thought you liked me merely as a friend."

"My darling, I love you. . . . I have loved you all along. But I can't marry you. . . ."

He must have felt me shiver—my head was pressed against his breast—for he went on hurriedly:

"My wife is insane—in an asylum—has been for

seven years. She can never recover—never get better. . . .''

I don't know what possessed me then. All I remember is that I got up and turned round and flung my arms about his neck. I believe that at that moment I, too, became mentally unbalanced. My will-power seemed to be gone. Never in my life had I felt like that before. It was as though a great wave of uncontrollable emotion and mad passion swept over me, blotting out all else. Nothing seemed to matter—except that mad desire—that exquisite yearning. . . .

He tried to calm me, tried to argue, reminded me of what might happen if . . .

But I clung to him still. There was no holding back now. What might happen afterwards didn't matter. Only one thing mattered.

I loved him . . . we loved each other. . . .

. . . . . .

The weeks which followed after he was gone were terrible. So often I had felt contempt—all women do who have retained their virginity—for girls who let men get them in their power. Yet with me it had been worse. Rupert had tried to restrain me. He had kept himself in check. I it had been who had forced him to give way at last; I who had more than surrendered myself. What must he think of me now that it was all over? Since that night I had not seen him again. Perhaps—probably—I never should see him again. And I loved him. Always should love him. That I knew. My own future seemed not to matter now.

"Think what might happen . . ." he had said. I still didn't want to think. I didn't care. Then I remembered my father's talk with me while I had been on leave, and that comforted me a little. My father would forgive me even if the worst should happen, as it had happened to that nurse. He knew what war was—what men were like in war-time. Men! No man's fault this time. Even if it had been any man's fault. . . .

A patient feebly calling to me brought me back to earth. I went over to him. His eyes—I can see them still—had sunk deep into his head. The skin of his cheeks was pulled tight over the cheek-bones. Already the face resembled wax.

The windows of the ward were open, for the heat was insufferable. At intervals the thunder of the guns made them rattle. I gave him water, spoke to him soothingly.

"B——, matron want you."

The sister who had spoken passed on. I rather disliked her. Once she had asked me what my father was. I had told her, and she had laughed harshly.

"Another parson's daughter," she had said with a sneer. "My father always warns me against parsons' daughters—and against parsons too."

And several of the nurses near had murmured "Hear, hear."

The matron received me with a friendly smile.

"We are to lose you, B——," she said. "I am sorry. You have done good work. Only last week I was saying so to . . ." She named two people of importance who had been on a tour of

inspection. "You go to the Ambulance Corps, I understand. I think you will be wasted there. V.A.D.'s who know their work are none too plentiful, I can assure you. You are to report first at Albert. Why, what is the matter?"

My face must have betrayed the sudden joy I felt. Rupert had not written, and I had not dared write to him. I felt sure he must be in Albert still.

"I am glad to go to the ambulances," I said. "I have been hospital nursing almost since the start, and I shall like the change."

"You think you will? Well, I hope you will, but I have my doubts. It must be risky work too when you get up near the line. But the women drivers are seldom sent there. And perhaps they will send you to a Base."

CHAPTER VI

THE individual to whom I had been ordered to report in Albert was bent almost double at a low table, writing. She was alone, and went on writing.

After standing there for some minutes, waiting for her to speak, it struck me that she might be deaf and not have heard me enter.

"Are you the . . ." I began.

"Speaking," she snapped, without looking up, and still writing.

"I have come to report from . . ."

"Who are you and what do you want?"

Intentional rudeness always annoys me. This woman was, I could see, trying to ape the manner of a rude male senior officer—some senior officers were very rude.

Controlling my temper—how often one had to do that during those war years!—I gave my name and told her why I had reported.

"I know nothing at all about you?" she rapped out, at last looking up. "And we have plenty of drivers, thank you."

"Then what am I to do?"

"I am *sure* I don't know," and I felt her add mentally, "and don't care."

She was a sour-looking creature, about forty-four, with dark, beady eyes and thin, compressed lips. She wore a wedding-ring, and I remember the thought

flashed through my mind, "What a dreadful life her poor husband must lead—if he survives."

Then something came over me, for without replying I sat down on the only chair, pulled out my cigarette-case and lit a cigarette. She smelt the smoke and looked up again from her writing.

"Are you aware what you are doing?" she shouted, glaring at me.

It was at this juncture that a major entered. He wore the R.A.M.C. badge. I had just time to crush my cigarette in my gloved hand before standing up, when he said:

"Excuse me, are you . . .?" He mentioned my name. "You were expected last night. You have to report in Dublin at once, —— Barracks."

That gave me a shock of bitter disappointment. And why, I wondered, should the order come from a M.O.? And how came it that the woman sitting there had not expected me, not even known my name?

Dublin! The last place I wanted to go to just then. So I should not see Rupert after all. I felt thoroughly disgruntled.

On the way to his orderly room—it looked like an orderly room—the major gave me further instructions. I gathered that in Dublin I was to go through an instructional course in driving, after which I should be expected to pass an examination. He was very friendly, and presently offered me some tea.

"You won't find that driving an ambulance is a beano," he remarked carelessly. "And you *may* be sent into the danger zone, if the war goes on much longer. Why don't you go on nursing?"

I explained that I felt I had done enough nursing, that I was tired of it.

"That's the worst of you people," he laughed. "All out for excitement and adventure. I doubt if one half of you V.A.D.'s and others are doing your bit just out of patriotism. Well, have it your own way. By the way, there's an officer here in " (he named a regiment and a company) "who would like to see you before you leave—Captain C. Says you are his cousin." He gave me a swift glance. "He'll be at the corner of the church in an hour's time," he went on, looking at his wrist-watch. "You can see the church from here," and he pointed out of the window. "It was really to tell you that that I came to look for you—I was told you had arrived. Your cousin is an old friend of mine," he added, and, though it may have been fancy, I thought his lip twitched as he said the word "cousin."

He gave me another cup of tea, chatting lightly about one thing and another, in particular asking me questions about myself, how long I had been in France. . . .

"You were smoking a cigarette when I saw you just now," he said carelessly, and there was a twinkle in his blue eyes as he held his case out to me. "Do you usually sit down and cross your thighs and smoke cigarettes when reporting for duty?"

I felt I was turning red, and looked down at the floor, unable to answer.

"That old trout!" he exclaimed. "I bet she said she didn't know you were expected, or anything about you. She does that to everyone who reports to her. Yet I told her myself yesterday that a new driver

would report from Amiens, and gave her your name. The women drivers here stand in terror of her, and if a driver happens to be good-looking. . . . But don't let's talk about that. Tell me—has your cousin, Captain C, known you long?"

"Not very long," I replied, trying to appear at ease.

"About how long? It is no business of mine, of course; only now that I have seen you I am rather astonished that Rupert should not have spoken about you to me before."

"As a matter of fact," I said, seeing that bluff would be wasted, "I met him some weeks ago, for the first time."

"Cousin on your mother's side, I suppose," he laughed. "But never mind. Only if he has other cousins I should like to meet them, that's all."

He changed the subject after that, and presently told me it was nearly six o'clock. Then he pointed the way to the church, and we parted.

I felt dreadfully nervous when Rupert appeared unexpectedly at a corner of a street. My heart was beating so that I could feel it—an unusual sensation for me. But at once he put me at my ease.

"What a darling you are to come," were his first words. "I doubted if you would. But I just had to send that message. I couldn't help it. I felt I must see you if I possibly could."

We turned into a side street, and walked slowly along. Somehow I couldn't speak. Soon we found ourselves outside the town, and close to the river.

"I wanted to write to you," he said suddenly. "Once or twice I almost did. Then I didn't because

I couldn't very well without saying something about —about what happened; and in war-time one never knows who may read letters that go through the post. Ever since that night I have felt so distressed. I wondered what you must think of me, because, you know, I am not that sort. I thought you would never forgive me. Perhaps you haven't."

I cannot well write down what my answer was, or the rest of our conversation, until the subject changed. I had just told him how put out I felt at having to go to Ireland for a probationer drivers' course—I think it was called that—when he smiled.

"You have to thank me for going to Ireland," he said lightly. "I know what ambulance drivers out here have to go through, and I determined to keep you out of it as long as I could. Z" (he named the important personage to whom he had been A.D.C.) "is so influential that almost anything he says 'goes.' I hinted to him that a friend of mine would most likely be joining the women drivers and that I wished she could be kept at a Base.

"'Is she a skilled driver?' he asked.

"I said I knew that she was not—though I didn't know—and after considering for a minute he said:

"'She might do a refresher course somewhere. Why not Dublin, where they train motor-drivers?'

"Of course I at once approved of the idea, and he gave a queer little laugh. He always laughs like that when he means to do something for somebody, so I was not astonished when I happened to hear from one of the women's squadron leaders—yes, they call themselves that, among various other things—

that after reporting here you were to report in Dublin."

I felt very much annoyed, yet at the same time very happy. He must care for me a great deal, I reflected, or he would not have done all that just out of (mistaken) kindness.

"I suppose you meant well," I said. "But I am dreadfully disappointed. I applied for a transfer only in order that I might be able to see what is really happening 'up there,' and now I shall see less than ever."

"I wouldn't worry," he answered. "I fear that nothing that I can do or say now will keep you long out of France; I am no longer A.D.C. to Z, you know. The war won't be over under another year or two, in my opinion, and God knows what will happen before the end. I believe that every able-bodied man and woman will be made to face the music. I understand that you leave here to-morrow morning."

"Yes. At nine o'clock."

We remained together until late. A bond of sympathy and mutual understanding seemed to have grown up between us. I believe that what had happened that night in Amiens had cemented our attachment. We talked about that night calmly enough now—the incident had broken down all barriers of reserve.

But at last we had to part. The parting from my brother on the outbreak of war had been painful enough, but it was as nothing by comparison with the agony I endured when Rupert told me that his time was up and that he must leave me. The question,

"Shall I ever see him again?" kept forcing itself into my brain in spite of my efforts to dispel it. Oh, how I hated the war that night! More than I had ever before hated it. While I watched him through blurred eyes striding away along the moonlit road back towards the town, I felt that to me nothing in the world mattered so long as Rupert came safely through the campaign.

The train towards the Base travelled slowly—if travelled it could be called, and not "progressed." It carried mostly men homeward bound on leave, and convalescents, and remained stationary almost as often as it moved. At Havre came the usual formalities, then embarkation and that cautious creeping out to sea in total darkness, with safety jackets close at hand, for enemy submarines were exceptionally active just then.

"*You bitch—may God strike you dead and all like you!*"

A huge Irish hooligan stood shaking his fist at me as I stepped on to Kingstown pier. Abuse followed, also a cascade of filthy expletives, but nobody paid attention or seemed to mind. On the other hand nobody laughed, or seemed to be amused. Ireland's hatred of England had begun to rival Germany's.

I drove with my luggage to the Dolphin Hotel, where I had once or twice stayed before the war, for I knew the manager would remember me. I found him in the big room, where the rule at that time was that politics and the war must not be discussed, and anybody breaking the rule was made to stand drinks to everybody present. He meta-

phorically received me with open arms, and with that Irish hospitality which so soon afterwards ceased to exist amongst almost all classes in Ireland. In the afternoon I reported at —— Barracks.

"They had no business to send you here," said the C.O., after referring to some papers in a pile. "The Curragh is your destination. I'll ring up the adjutant there and tell her you are here. Meanwhile stay here and make yourself at home."

She looked me up and down with obvious approval.

"Are there more like you at home?" she said, smiling, using a catch-phrase then popular. "They are a mixed lot here, you know, so you'd better be careful. Where do you come from?"

I told her.

"So you've been in France. I wish I had. By the way, as you will go by road to the Curragh, and by night, I had better warn you. The Sinn Feiners rather hate us, and have a nasty habit of stretching a wire across any lonely road they think a Government car may come along in the dark, in the hope of wrecking the car or cutting the driver's head off. So far they have not succeeded in doing either, but you must be on your guard."

She smiled again, and once more looked hard at me. She was quite a handsome woman.

"It would be dreadful if a pretty head like yours were to be cut off," she said. "You are a lovely creature! Don't you find it awkward to be so good-looking—at a time like this? Don't the men embarrass you?"

I was embarrassed by the question, but replied with

an assumption of self-confidence that I was capable of taking care of myself.

"So you think," she laughed. "We all think that at your age. I thought so myself—but was mistaken. Well, all good luck to you, dear. I'll see you later."

The girl who drove me to the Curragh was just under my own age. Thrilled at hearing that I had been in France, she put question after question to me, until I grew tired of answering her, and became silent.

"Do you happen to know Christabel Ellis?" she asked suddenly.

I knew her by name, of course. What woman war-worker did not know Christabel Ellis by name? She had been in Serbia and in Russia, and was now said to be driving a motor transport wagon on the British front in Flanders.

"She is a friend of mine," my companion continued, accelerating suddenly so that the lamps of the car blazed along the straight road. "I have written to ask her to wangle my going to France: the letter ought to reach her some time—but I fear she may refuse to 'wangle.' I am more than sick of Ireland. Been here eight months. It would be fun if we could go together, because you know the ropes and—and I like you. I suppose lots of men have been in love with you?"

Again that everlasting topic—men. Always those two topics—men—love. Could they never think of something else, these girls? Had they no other interests in life? Or—I occasionally wondered—was I different from other girls, did I lack something,

some kind of emotional stimulant which they possessed?

Then a thought came to me. Brothers. I had four brothers. Perhaps that made a difference. Since then I have felt convinced that brothers do make a difference to any girl. Not that they keep her in order when she and they are young. I don't mean that. But whereas a girl without brothers generally grows up in the belief that all men are wonderful beings, the girl with brothers knows all about men's shortcomings, their faults and vices, their childishness and (often) their selfishness. So quite early in life she becomes disillusioned—if she ever were illusioned, which is doubtful.

CHAPTER VII

IRELAND!

What a land flowing with milk and honey after the strict rationing that England was suffering from. What a contrast by comparison with those devastated areas in France with their miserable, half-starved refugees!

Eggs, butter, milk, cheese, meat, bread, sugar—everything in profusion. And golden sovereigns everywhere—there were no longer any in circulation in England.

I went to a bazaar in Dublin.

All sorts of rascals, card sharps, confidence crooks and others had been admitted in return for contributing £50 or £60 each to the charitable object of which the bazaar was in aid—or so I was told. Once in, they were at liberty to fleece anybody and everybody in any way they chose.

I went into a big marquee and watched the *roulette*. On every number on the green cloth were little piles of sovereigns. The croupier had before him a pile of gold which must have been worth several hundred pounds. Everybody gambled. There were two zeros. The second was said to be "in aid of the good cause."

"Sure and the Good Cause wins again!"

I can hear the croupier's raucous voice still, see his gleeful grin, and hear the ironical laughter as

the gold was raked in. It was not counted. It was added to the pile held by the bank. So how could the rascals know how much to hand over to the Good Cause? Just a bit of bluff, but nobody seemed to care.

"That's right—knock your bloody head off before the Germans get it!" was shouted at me by a young Irishman one day, when I had banged my head whilst boarding a tram.

Those Irish girls, too. They were taking money from the British Government, and glad to get it, for driving cars, helping in messes and canteens, and so on. Yet many times I heard them (some of them) curse the English and say they hoped to God that Germany would win the war.

"Sure and I'd help the poor Kaiser to-morrow if I could," was said by several of them in my hearing. In our mess, too, you could see them listening intently when anything was said about "stores with escort," which meant, of course, arms or ammunition; for you don't send an armed escort with comestibles.

One day twenty soldiers and a sergeant marched out of (I think) Portobello Barracks with their rifles and equipment, etc., and were never seen again. They were traitors and had joined the rebels. A ton of gelignite—enough to blow up half Dublin, I was told—vanished from Amiens Street railway station. Lorries with fatigue parties went to North Wall quay one morning and demanded and signed for forty or fifty cases of rifles and a quantity of ammunition and rifle-grenades and drove away with the lot, unquestioned. They, too, were Sinn Feiners disguised as British soldiers, it was afterwards

discovered. And other "regrettable incidents" of that sort happened. The Irish girls cheered when told. I don't say all. But some of them.

And how our Government blundered! You know how touchy the Irish are as a race. How they have all their feelers out and are ever ready to take offence, think they are being slighted or snubbed. Though professing to hate the English, the young men were furious at not being conscripted. They looked upon that, too, as another injustice. When (too late) attempts were made to induce some of them to join the colours, recruiters amongst the Roman Catholics were Protestants, and worse still, some were Presbyterians. It never occurred to our Big Wigs, apparently, that this amazing want of tact must annoy the Catholic population. It infuriated them. The mistake was due merely to thoughtlessness, no doubt—call it arrant stupidity if you like, for really it was that.

While I was at the Curragh a conspiracy for sending boots to England, filled with fresh butter, was discovered! The boots went to and fro in packing-cases containing each several dozen pairs. Profitable smuggling while it lasted.

A delightful spot, the Curragh. Plenty of tennis and other amusements, and race meetings about once a month. Hunting too, in the season. I had hunted with the Kildare before the war, and knew the country well. At that time the native population had all been charming. So hospitable, too. Particularly the farmers. But now . . .

One day a Great Brass Hat arrived, with his suite of Lesser Brass Hats. They came unexpectedly,

made a surprise tour of inspection, paraded the women, paid compliments and commended here, found a few faults there—put the wind up everybody as surprise inspections always did.

After an excellent lunch they commandeered from several units many gallons of petrol. Special lorries came to fetch it. Then they all went away. Everybody felt relieved.

Some days later a tremendous *strafe*. Brass Hats? Not a bit of it. Sinn Feiners masquerading as Brass Hats!

It is often said that the Irish are born actors. Some of them in war-time were born rogues too.

Those few weeks on the Curragh were like a picnic. The probationers' training course in motor-driving was the softest thing on earth. Daily joy trips—they were that to all intents, for any man or woman not mentally deficient can learn in a few hours how to drive a Ford. All that was needed after that was a little practice in steering, particularly in traffic. During the rest of the day there was usually nothing to do—at most one was detailed to meet some senior officer at a railway station and convey him to his hut or billet.

He would sometimes be one of the amorous sort, particularly if he had dined well or the hour was late. And such strong breath—champagne, port, brandy, or all three—was unpleasant. But one had to put up with it, as with other disagreeable things. "Never thwart or annoy a senior officer if you can help it" was a motto among the women war-workers with whom I served.

I remember during the war seeing a play in one

of the London theatres, to which wounded soldiers and sailors had been specially invited—they almost filled the house. With incredible want of tact the management had staged a war play for the poor fellows, with a realistic dressing-station scene in one of the acts. Towards the end of the act the beautiful heroine advanced towards the footlights, and in a voice tense with emotion, as the novelists say, cried out:

"*No man who has been in the trenches does not long to get back there again!*"

The laughter and cat-calls and ironical applause which greeted this outburst of mock patriotism held up the play for many minutes, causing the unfortunate actress in the end to burst into tears.

I had not been near the trenches, but I had seen enough of war already to detest it. Therefore even now I cannot understand why, after a short time on the Curragh, I longed to get back to France again. Delightful though the Curragh was, one felt that it lacked—something. Excitement? Nervous tension? "Atmosphere"? Possibly. Or perhaps one felt in one's inner consciousness that one had no right to be enjoying life and amusing oneself while there was so much to be done "out there."

And so I, too, tried to pull some wires—I had friends among the "people who mattered," men as well as women, including my father's old friend who had been a friend of Lord Roberts's. And within a month the pulling proved successful. Almost on the same day my driver got her order for France, and a week later we were on our way to Havre.

"You are both to go to Puchevillers," we were

told at Havre. "Few women have been that far up."

Where was Puchevillers? We had no idea. We discovered it on our maps of France, a village close to Toutencourt, near Acheux and between Albert and Doullens. We gathered that there was a casualty clearing station there, and severe fighting not far away.

For some time I had not heard from Rupert, and I was growing anxious. For day by day my love for him increased. I was not an immoral woman—not "all things to all men," as some were—yet I longed for him again, was ready to do anything he might ask. What if he were wounded—killed! The bare thought made me feel faint and physically ill, and I tried to put it from me. Occasionally the thought would come to me that I might become a mother! What would happen to me in the event of such a tragedy? Many of my friends, or supposed friends, would turn their backs on me, particularly my circle of acquaintance in the Midlands, engaged in knitting socks and mufflers and organizing jumble sales and work-parties. How "the County" would purse their lips, raise their eyebrows! How they would chatter about me in undertones at their tea-parties! And my brother Lionel, who thought so little of the injury he had done Nurse T whom he had met at St. Omer—how ashamed he would be of his fallen sister! Yes, that was what he would call me, if he called me nothing worse; I knew what his talk was like regarding unmarried mothers. They were wantons, all of them, harlots, in his opinion, and he would have no mercy

on me—not that I should want mercy from such a brother. So many men, I discovered during the war, who thought nothing of seducing girls, were wholly devoid of tolerance if a woman in their own rank of life gave way to temptation, surrendered under provocation to the strongest of natural impulses.

With an effort I at last changed my train of thought. My father had written some days before, saying that "all was well with Nurse T," and that until the event was over and she was convalescent he would attend to her wants for my sake—from which I rightly concluded that he had placed her in some nursing home and was defraying her expenses. One line in his letter had made me pause:

"If a thing like that happened to you, my darling . . . it would be too dreadful—it would almost kill me. . . . Be careful. You know that I love you more than I love anybody in this world, and always shall, no matter what may happen to you. . . ."

I folded the letter—I had just read it again—and tried to forget that line; and as I did so the girl who had come with me from Ireland came into the room. She looked serious and rather pale.

"We go up the line to-morrow," she said in a peculiar voice. Then she came over and put her arms around me, and I felt that she was breathing quickly.

"What is the matter, dear?" I asked, though I thought I already knew.

"Oh, I can't tell you—I can't; I feel so ashamed," she almost whispered, then burst into sobs on my shoulder.

"Don't be a little donkey," I said, smoothing her hair. "I felt frightened too the first time I was told I should soon be in the danger zone—I didn't go, after all. My mouth went all dry, and I felt horrible inside, just as you do now. It isn't really funk, darling. It's just nerves. You'll find out soon that I am right. It is how people feel when they get what is called stage fright, or have to make a public speech, things like that. You'll soon get over it. Everybody does." I had been told that so far women were not allowed near the trenches.

"How comforting you are, Connie," she said some moments later, dabbing her handkerchief on her eyes. "I should hate to be afraid—I never thought I should be."

"Well, don't let anybody see or *think* you are; that is the important thing. I've got some Easton Syrup and I'll give you some. It calms one's nerves in a wonderful way. You won't believe you ever felt—'afraid.'"

The train was packed with troops, and at Rouen more troops entrained. They had just come out from England, and they laughed and joked and sang. Slowly the train dragged its way along. If, as often happened, it stopped near a village, children in their dozens would come running out of the houses, stretching out their arms and calling "Beeskeet! Beeskeet!" and "Bullee beef!" The men threw them rations, and money too, which was strictly against orders. One day a tin of bully beef thus

flung out of a train hit a little boy on the head and killed him.

For mile after mile along both sides of the railroad track lay empty ration tins in millions, thrown out of trains by troops going up the line. The French Government devised a scheme for collecting all this waste tin and making use of it. But the scheme never matured.

Nor was comic relief wanting on that journey. The temperature was about eighty, the sun blazed fiercely, and perspiration poured down our faces and our bodies. Once when the crawling train made one of its many stoppages the Tommies noticed that beside the track lay a big tank for watering locomotives. Without a moment's hesitation several of them stripped themselves naked, clambered down from the train and plunged into the water, amid shouts of amusement from their companions, whose heads protruded from the windows of every carriage.

The driver, of course, heard the uproar, and, being something of *farceur,* set his engine going. In very few seconds the bathers had sprung out of their " tub " and were pursuing the train without a stitch of clothing on. I remember wondering what Mrs. Grundy would have said had that incident happened at home!

Amiens once more. A change had come over the town even in those few weeks. There were more troops in the streets and many more refugees. And the air had a curious " flavour." We soon learnt what that " flavour " was. The town had some days before, we were told, had " a whiff of gas "—the last

time I had heard that phrase I had been in a dentist's chair. Again my little friend was "nervy," and I had difficulty in comforting her. She ought, of course, never to have been sent near the danger zone. She was temperamentally unsuited to face danger—at least I thought so then.

I did not want her to be laughed at by the other women, some of whom were of the "catty" type and apparently without nerves of any sort, so I kept her with me as much as I could. I found out indirectly that Rupert's company had left Albert, but whither it had gone I was unable to discover.

"Somebody was asking for you to-day," my friend—I will call her Gwen, though that was not her name—said to me as we sat together at breakfast one morning in the principal hotel in ——, where I had leave to take my meals if I wanted to. Suddenly she looked across the room.

"There, that's the man," she added quickly, indicating him with her eyes.

A spasm shot through me. Rupert was breakfasting at a small table, alone. Almost immediately his glance met mine, but my smile met with no recognition. He stared at me for a moment or two, as though he didn't know me, then went calmly on with his meal.

I wanted to cry out. I thought for an instant that I should. Once or twice again I looked in his direction; but now the newspaper he was reading hid his face.

Could I have offended, annoyed him in any way? He had stopped writing while I was in Ireland, but not for a moment had I imagined that he might have

taken offence; I had concluded that his silence must for some reason be unavoidable. Yet, seeing him there, I still felt a sense of relief—he was, at any rate, safe.

I knew that Gwen was looking from one to the other, no doubt wondering why, after inquiring for me, he should ignore me.

I pulled myself together.

"How did he come to inquire for me?" I said, trying to look unconcerned. "How did he know that you knew me?"

"He said he had been told by somebody, he didn't say who. He knew that we had arrived here together. I was sent in my car to the officers' mess of" (she named a unit) "to pick up some kit and dump it at the railway station, and I asked the first officer I saw if he could tell me where to find the adjutant. That was the officer I spoke to. What is his name?"

I told her. Just then he got up. Several British and several French officers were breakfasting in the room, and as he passed close to one of them he looked at him hard. He gave me another glance, but still showed no sign of recognition.

Hardly had he left the room when the British officer at whom he had stared pushed back his chair, and rose. Having collected his cap, he left the room by a different door—rather hurriedly, I thought.

Some moments later two shots rang out in the street, and, looking out of the window, I saw a car disappearing round a corner at high speed.

Everybody remained calm. The officers went on eating their breakfast. A minute or two afterwards

Rupert re-entered and came up to me. A little way behind him was the A.P.M.

"Would you recognize the officer who went out some moments ago?" Rupert said to me quickly, in an undertone.

"I think so," I replied. "He had a cut on the left side of his neck."

"Good. You may be of use to me. The man is a spy. I had breakfast here specially to keep an eye on him, and he has escaped again. Wait here. I'll be back in a moment."

He rejoined the A.P.M., and together they went out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII

When I went out, after finishing my breakfast, Rupert was waiting for me. He made a sign to me to follow him. In the street was a car, and he told me to get into it.

"Darling," he said, taking my hand as the car sped along, "I had to pretend not to recognize you. I am doing intelligence work now. That man was suspected of being a spy, but there were reasons why we couldn't at once take action or arrest him. He must have become suspicious suddenly, for the moment he was in the street he jumped into a car he had waiting there, and was off. He fired twice at a corporal who tried to intercept the car, but missed both times."

"But why had you to appear not to recognize me?" I asked.

"Because I think that spy had seen us together—in Albert. He was in the boat you went to Ireland in, and he spoke to you. He wore a hospital nurse's uniform then, so no wonder you didn't recognize him. The A.P.M. gets hold of all sorts of information of that sort and it is all carefully noted: we are on our way to the A.P.M. now. You will be shown portraits, photographs, of spies and suspected spies, and expected to impress their faces on your memory. The chief reason you are going there now is to see one portrait in particular and say if you, too, think it is the man with the cut on his neck."

It did not take me long to recall to mind talking

in the boat to a hospital nurse. "She" had been quite friendly, and given me some cigarettes. Reflecting more carefully, it came back to me that "she" had asked me quite a lot of questions of one sort and another, most of which I had answered at haphazard.

At the A.P.M.'s office I at once identified the man I had seen at breakfast, from his photograph, though it showed him in mufti. I was then told that in his luggage at the hotel which he had left in such a hurry had just been found French, Austrian, German and British uniforms, the uniform of a French nurse and of a British Red Cross nurse, and some ordinary day frocks.[1]

When I look back on those war years after this lapse of time, and think of all that happened apart from the actual fighting, it seems to me that many of us, perhaps most of us (I am speaking now of women who served in the war area), must in some sort of way have taken leave of our senses—though we afterwards recovered them.

Because—think what we were like before the war, what our moral outlook was, how well we behaved, how easily we were shocked. Then reflect how all those ideas and all that good behaviour later on went overboard. It was extraordinary, amazing when you come to think about it. Nothing but war, nothing but a great and terrible war could have changed womanhood, or a considerable part of our womanhood, as that four years' campaign changed it. If

[1] I heard afterwards that this spy was traced to Havre, from Havre to Plymouth, thence to London, and thence to Cardiff, where he was caught.

before the year 1915 any man had dared to say certain things to me (tried to do certain things), I should have been furious. Yet by the end of 1915 or the beginning of 1916 one had become so accustomed to hearing coarse language and filthy stories—the stories and the language of some of the women I mixed with vied with the men's in nastiness—that one no longer felt even disconcerted.

Self-control, resistance to natural impulses and desires, also went by the board. In the forest of Rouvray, some miles above Rouen and close to the hospitals, also in the Forêt Verte (through stretches of which I often had to drive), I came several times upon spectacles which before the war would have upset me very much. But after a year or longer in the war atmosphere such sights did not upset me, though they rather disgusted me. They made me realize again how little removed from animals men and women are. There were nurses and drivers who, coming upon such spectacles, would afterwards talk quite openly about what they had seen, and joke about it—sometimes even mention names. Without wishing to boast, I can say with truth that right through the war I kept my own counsel in that respect. For to "split," as my brothers used to call it, to betray secrets one had no business to know, has always seemed to me to be an odious thing to do.

And I suppose it was because the war had so changed us, so lowered our moral standard, that when the one man in the world I had come to love truly and devotedly told me that in ten days he would be in the front line, I cast all principles aside.

I was alone with him in his billet. It was evening and almost dark. I was sitting in his big chair, looking at him, when a physical craving which had been gradually growing swept over me all at once—a wave of furious desire such as I had experienced that night in Amiens.

He stood a little way from me, knocking out his pipe, and in my eyes he must have read my thoughts, because suddenly his expression changed.

"Good God, Connie, don't look at me like that!" he exclaimed in a low, strained voice. "What do you think I am made of?"

He came over to me slowly, his eyes gazing into mine. He bent down and put his hands behind my head and drew it against his chest and feverishly kissed my hair.

"Rupert—oh Rupert!" the words burst from me before I could check myself, "I can't bear it any longer—take me—do anything you want—I am crazy for you—Rupert, I love you so utterly . . . and so soon you will be leaving me . . . Rupert . . . darling . . . my darling . . ."

I was in his arms, held closely to him. His lips were pressed on mine. His hands stroked me everywhere . . . every fibre in me quivered . . . ecstasy intoxicated my imagination. . . .

And all the while it seemed to me that this was not my real self, that a new self possessed me, a self I could not control or calm, that in some way or other I lived during those minutes in a different world—a dream world from which later I should awaken.

. . . . . .

And so those nine days of mad happiness passed.

. . . . . .

A week after he had gone my orders came through. I was to join several ambulances on the following evening and proceed to Puchevillers. Not a convoy.

So for the moment my misery was to some extent allayed. There was so much to be seen to and done within the next twenty-four hours. The squadron leader, as she liked to be called, had instructions to give me. My little friend Gwen would be with us, I was glad to hear. I had taken her into my confidence and told her everything, and she had been so kind and sympathetic: for I had felt I must tell somebody, yet there was nobody else to whom I would have dreamed of revealing my secret.

For days the guns up the line had been rumbling at intervals. One had grown so accustomed to hearing them that now one hardly noticed them. Gwen seemed at last to have her nerves under control. Or perhaps she dreaded letting any of the women guess that she felt nervous. She had grown quite devoted to me, too deeply devoted for my peace of mind. Girls had been like that before, and I didn't like it.

I believe we were the first women drivers allowed so near the actual fighting. As yet there were very few of our women in France, other than nurses. I think the few drivers there were had transferred from nursing to driving. I forget what year this was, but we were well on in the war.

The guns were louder now. A curious thing I noticed many times in France was that sometimes

the guns sounded louder when a long way off than when one came nearer to them. It had to do with air currents, I was told. Gwen found me in the dark, and asked me to give her some more Easton Syrup.

"I always feel safer when I am near you, darling," she whispered rather pathetically. "Oh, I do hope I shall not do something dreadful, run away or something. But the noise upsets me so. I keep on thinking, imagining all that is happening up there, picturing in my mind the terrible slaughter that is going on. I heard one of the girls say that we shall never take that place, that it has swamps and marshes all round it and our men can't get across. Isn't it all too horrible? And so stupid and unnecessary when you come to think about it."

I could not agree that it was unnecessary, but stupid—yes. The utter stupidity of all wars had long ago forced itself upon me. I gave her some of the syrup, and its effect was almost instantaneous. Some of the officers too used to take it, I heard afterwards.

Day was dawning when we came to Puchevillers. Its lanes with their little hedges made me think of Devonshire. When we had reported and parked our cars I went out into the undulating open country with Gwen. It looked like a great brown sea—the sun had shrivelled the grass—rolling away until lost to sight in the blue haze near the skyline, beyond which the battle raged. A long, white, curving road disappeared in the blue mist. To the left of us stood the huge hospital tents, for this was a casualty clearing station, the first I had seen. Several old women were working in the fields. A church bell was ringing

for early Mass. A lark sang high up in the sky. And away over the rising ground, half hidden by the mist, the guns pounded and pounded. As a study in contrasts it was wonderful.

We wanted some tea. There was none to be had.

"Plenty of whisky, brandy and champagne," said the M.O. we had spoken to. "You'll find it in that tent. But wait here and I'll see what I can do for you."

He was in his shirt-sleeves, the sleeves rolled up to the elbow. A red splash was on his chest. He came back presently, having been unable to get tea, and mixed stiff brandies-and-sodas—the first time I had drunk brandy-and-soda at five o'clock in the morning.

We passed an open bell-tent. Eight or ten M.O.'s in their shirt-sleeves were having drinks and talking. Their eyes were bloodshot and their hair in disorder, and they looked terribly worn out. Later we heard that they had been on duty over forty-eight hours, almost without sleep and with scarcely time to eat. There were fourteen M.O.'s at work in those tents, cutting, slicing, bandaging, working swiftly and almost in silence and without a thought for themselves. Wonderful men. At the Bases one heard the M.O.'s spoken of lightly, sometimes contemptuously; I had myself been tempted to consider them a poor lot, out chiefly to enjoy themselves when their light duties were done. How mistaken I had been I now realized. Were the M.O.'s adequately rewarded for what they did in the war? I think not. But then, they sought no reward or recognition. They were there to do their best and they never spared them-

selves. How different, I remember thinking, from the gentleman who had walked up and down the quay for a year at a Base, and then gone home with a D.S.O.!

In the rear of the hospital tents was another long road, white as the first, but straighter. That road, too, led to where the battle raged. Out of the clouds of dust a long procession slowly emerged. It looked like an endless snake, grey, with red crosses along its back, crosses that dwindled as the snake diminished in the distance.

At frequent intervals the snake would stop crawling. Then out of its head stretchers were gently lifted. Each car had four stretchers, each covered with a brown blanket. The stretchers were laid in rows upon the brown grass; nurses fluttered about them; orderlies came along with big cans of water. And whenever a M.O. could be spared from the tents he would come hurrying down to those rows of brown blankets. Meanwhile the grey snake with the red crosses had again crawled forward; and each time it halted the same thing took place.

Having been a V.A.D., I was called upon to help. In Base hospitals I had seen dreadful wounds, but those had been already treated and fully dressed. These men I was seeing now came direct from the battlefield *viâ* the dressing station, and their mutilated bodies were often horrible to look at. Here a boy in his teens with half his inside shot away. There a poor wretch with his face gone. Beyond him a sergeant—legs and arms paralysed. And yet, incredible as it may seem, hardly any of those victims murmured a complaint, in spite of the agonies that

most of them must have suffered. Sometimes they would wince, even betray their agony by making some fearful grimace. But that was all. Until the time came when they were moved. The slight oscillation caused merely by lifting their stretchers made some of them scream out, or yell some frightful words. And then generally, if a nurse were near, they would try to express regret. Those apologies used (almost) to amuse me. They would have if anything could have provoked amusement in the midst of so much frightfulness. They would have amused me only because I had heard nurses themselves use words just as bad.

Only one man cried out while I was helping near the stretchers. He kept raising himself on one elbow, all the time shouting wildly :

"*Drop fifty—repeat! Drop fifty—repeat!*"

He died before his turn came to be carried into the tent, and for the rest of the day and in my dreams that night that cry of his went on ringing in my ears : "*Drop fifty—repeat!*"

For some days I was detained at the casualty clearing station, though they had no right to detain me. The shortage of nurses was so great, however, that any woman with even slight knowledge of nursing was commandeered if possible. I saw women nursing there who had been munition workers, and women who early in the war had answered Baroness Orczy's call; she it was who had inaugurated the Women of England's Active Service League, though others got most of the credit. Now the Married Men's Military Act was in full force, and I wondered if my brother Lionel would succeed

much longer in bluffing the authorities and so escaping military service. He was, of course, not even married.

The thunder of the guns seemed to come from three directions. Rumours reached us of alleged victories and alleged disasters. There was said to be heavy fighting at Delville Wood still, and at Bapaume and Pozières and elsewhere. Indeed, there were rumours of fighting all along the line. But it was quite impossible to know what to believe, for the reports were so contradictory. Horrible war! How monstrous it all seemed. How iniquitous, how criminal that all these lives, young lives most of them, should be cut short like this, that men in their thousands should be cut to pieces, blinded, maimed for life, deprived of their reason. Sometimes now I wonder how we women came through it all without ourselves becoming insane. I suppose the secret was that, as I have already said, we all tried not to think —we had little time for thinking except when off duty, and then we were so exhausted that most of us fell asleep. Yet there were nights when I, and I expect others, cried ourselves to sleep at the inhumanity and brutality of it all.

I was glad to get away from those hospital tents at last, with their stifling odour of human bodies, and sweat, and disinfectants, and iodoform, and death, for I felt I could not much longer have endured the strain—I had been there over a week, or was it ten days? Gwen, too, had been commandeered, and the way she bore up astonished me—her first experience of nursing in the war area.

What would happen to her now, I wondered as we

set out that night? Would she collapse—" show the white feather " as most people would call it—turn tail by " going sick," become suddenly hysterical? I determined to keep my eye on her and support her as best I could.

CHAPTER IX

We set out after dark by a roundabout route in order not to meet incoming ambulances. Ahead of us and to right and left the flashes and the roar of the guns resembled a tremendous thunder-storm. I thought of Rupert—I believe I prayed as I drove along that he might not be up there. Since leaving Amiens I again had no news of him or from him—it would not have been possible for him to communicate even had he known my whereabouts.

Prayed! How foolish it seemed to pray. How futile to imagine there could be such a thing as a God, least of all a good God, while such horrors prevailed. As though a God supposed to be good and all-powerful would not at once have stopped the hideous carnage. If what we called God existed, then he must be some fiend lusting for blood, a sadist without heart or reason, revelling in what was happening on the earth.

I thought of our smug parsons at home preaching their silly little sermons every Sunday, telling people to be good, kind to one another and forgiving, while themselves squabbling over petty sacerdotal matters—the correct length of a stole, the wickedness of wearing a biretta and imitating the rites of Rome, and similar trivialities.

And at the Bases—those church parades that the men hated but were made to attend; the officer read-

ing the lesson as though he believed what he read; the chaplain mournfully intoning the service in that unctuous clerical drawl which always amused (and annoyed) my father. Why were not all parsons like my father? Why could they not be men of perspicacity, broad-minded, considerate, tolerant, devoid of humbug and hypocrisy and make-believe?

Thoughts, thoughts, all sorts of thoughts crowded in upon me during that slow night drive with the thunder and flashes ever increasing in intensity. It was the first time for days that I had had time to think about anything but the agonized sufferers in those tents and what one could do to alleviate their pain a little.

And those doctors—M.O.'s as they were called—I must refer to them again. People talk about the kindness of women, talk of their sympathy, "ministering angels" and the rest of it. Why, those M.O.'s were the kindest, noblest, most self-sacrificing beings I had ever met in all my life. And the hospital orderlies too, many of them. I am certain that not one among all those doctors and orderlies would not willingly have sacrificed his life to save the life of a patient. I hoped that after the war I should meet some of them, but I never have. I suppose that now most of the M.O.'s are in private practice, perhaps in provincial towns and country villages, attending to old ladies with imaginary ailments and children with mumps or croup or adenoids or cutting their first teeth. Of another thing, too, I am sure—those surgeons never breathe one word about the splendid work they did out there among the maimed and mutilated men, that frightful human wreckage.

"*Christ in Heaven!*"

The cry came from just in front of me. A girl's voice—the driver of the car some yards ahead of mine. There had been a red flash above our heads and something had hit my car; the first shell I had seen explode near enough to kill me—I wish it had been the last.

The car in front of me had stopped. I got down and went forward.

"The bloody thing's bitched my radiator!"

Then she burst into tears and became hysterical.

It is not always an advantage to be cursed with a sense of humour. The contrast between that angry outburst and the display of weakness which had at once followed it actually made me laugh—though Heaven knows I felt frightened enough.

There was nothing for it but to tow the disabled car behind one of the other ambulances. The bombardment was still a long way ahead of us; the most magnificent display of fireworks imaginable—if only it had been less cruel. Where that solitary shrapnel had come from I cannot to this day imagine. On later occasions when I came under fire from shrapnel, one shell was always followed by more.

At last we reached the area where we had orders to wait. What stands out most prominently in my mind to-day, after the lapse of years, is the utterly appalling noise there was. No words can describe it, convey the least idea of what it was like, because it resembled nothing on earth. The big explosions and the explosions not so loud; the small shells bursting; the tak-tak-tak of the machine-guns; the

rattle of rifle fire; and now and again explosions which sounded as though the world itself had been blown to pieces—if there is a hell it cannot be worse than the hell we saw that night.

Some lines I have read come back to me:

> "Trunks, face downward in the sucking mud,
> Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled;
> And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,
> Bulged, clotted heads, lay in the filthy slime. . . ."

No wonder women drivers were not allowed to come so near the actual fighting until much later; even we were not quite near it. I doubt if the majority would have been able to stand even the noise of the pandemonium that night. The men were astonished at seeing us.

I stumbled over someone kneeling, and saw she was tying a bootlace.

It was Gwen!

She looked up.

"Cheerio," she called.

"Gwen!" I exclaimed.

"It's me all right."

I could hardly believe it. Yet what had happened to her happened (later) to scores of girls who imagined they would never have courage enough to carry on. She had outgrown her fear—her "nerves." When I had assured her that she would, I had not believed that she would. I had said that only to give her confidence—if I could.

She finished tying the lace, and stood up.

"If only this racket would stop," she shouted to me above the din, and put her hands to her ears. "I've got a splitting headache."

At that instant there came another deafening explosion. I heard afterwards that a mine had been exploded—a "grotto" the men called it—"with glorious results." I forget how many men it was said to have blown to pieces.

"What was that, Connie?"

Gwen, at my elbow, had shouted the question to me. She might have been inquiring the score in a tennis match. She was lighting a cigarette.

"Gwen," I shouted back, "I think you are amazing. When I think of your hysterics and panicking only the other day. . . . Tell me how you feel."

Her hand was on my arm. It did not tremble.

There was a momentary lull in the roar.

"I feel as if I had been through some terrible ordeal, and come out of it none the worse. Isn't it queer? I used to think the only way to get courage was to make oneself blotto. I hope it will last."

The order came along that we were all to rest. I shared a tent with Gwen and two other drivers. But, though worn out, none of us could sleep. Excitement and the racket kept us awake. We sat there talking and drinking hot coffee.

Gwen had used the word "blotto." During those four years I saw much drunkenness. But not once did I see any woman worker intoxicated, or even what our Midland farmers call "market merry." That point is worth noting.

It is not my intention to disgust readers by piling on the agony, labouring the horrors of battle and of what one saw in hospitals. That has been done

by other writers—overdone in my opinion. I have read war books whose authors appear to think their readers must be devoid of imagination, if not half imbecile. Or is it that they delight in wallowing in anatomical and gruesome portrayals of war victims in hospitals and in the trenches, and gloat over the bloodshed? I wonder if they saw what they describe, or draw on their imagination?

Owing partly to influence brought to bear in high quarters by my father's old friend who helped me at the outset (and possibly to the fact that my father was well connected), I was granted privileges. I had more liberty than most V.A.D.'s or drivers, and more authority. Also I was not compelled, as they were, to conform to petty regulations. That, you may say, was unjust. It was. But it was a case of each for herself during the war, and I know that every V.A.D. and every Waac who could pull a wire likely to benefit her, pulled it.

The work of driving ambulances with wounded back to the casualty clearing station at Puchevillers was extremely exhausting, particularly as one had to be careful to avoid holes in the road which might have made the ambulances bump, and the slightest bump could cause a wounded man exquisite pain. It was during one of these drives that a scrap of shell hit me, leaving a scar which remains to this day. That meant weeks in a nursing home in Southsea, at the end of which time the stitches were removed and I was once more pronounced fit for duty.

And during all those weeks I had no news of Rupert. He had my home address, whence letters

would have been forwarded, and each morning I anxiously scanned the long lists of casualties.

While with my father on the sea front one afternoon—he was staying in the town in order to be near me—he surprised me by saying:

"I wonder, Connie, who the father of Nurse T's child is? I tried once or twice to lead her on to tell me, but I saw it embarrassed her so I said no more. Have you any suspicion?"

"Why do you want to know, father?" I evaded the question by asking. For on no account must he suspect that it was Lionel.

"Well, I saw her sometimes, before the child arrived. One afternoon she was asleep. I thought I would sit there until she awoke, and—well, she began to murmur in her dreams."

As he stopped speaking his eyes met mine. They had an odd expression.

"I can't see what that has to do with her child's father," I said, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

"Can't you?" he replied, with the semblance of a smile. "Connie, before you went away you were quicker in the uptake. In her sleep she spoke of you—more than once. And another name. Did you ever speak to her of Lionel?"

"I may have," I said weakly.

"Yet you never told me she knew Lionel. Where did they meet? In France?"

Then I knew that he knew—that Nurse T must, in her sleep, have revealed her secret.

"Oh, father!" I exclaimed, "I kept the truth from you. I hoped that you would never know. Yes, her child is Lionel's. But Lionel didn't seduce

her, though probably he thinks he did. Does mother know? "

"Dear me, no. She wouldn't understand. She would think I did wrong in befriending that nurse. You know how old-fashioned she is. It is not her fault."

While he was speaking a great wave of love for my father had swept over me. We were alone, and nobody was near. I put my hand impulsively on his.

"Father," I said, "you are so good, so generous, so broad-minded. I have always told you all my secrets since I was a tiny tot, haven't I? I wonder if you could bear to hear another secret—the greatest secret I have ever had? I have told only one living soul, a great friend of mine whom I can trust, a girl called Gwen ——. She was with me in France. An ambulance driver too."

I felt his fingers close tightly on mine, so tightly that they almost hurt. For a minute he did not speak. Then he said quietly:

"You needn't, my darling. I know it."

"Know it! But how? When?"

"Your eyes told me the first time I came to see you in the nursing home. It was a dreadful shock. Dreadful. And yet I hoped that you would tell me. I am glad you have."

I wanted to reply, but I couldn't. I sat there quite still, while my dear father still held my hand. And the thought came to me of girls I had known whose parents had driven them from home, turned them out into the streets—for *that*.

And after that I opened my heart to him, told

him how it had all come about, told him about Rupert and how I loved him and how anxious I felt at not hearing from him.

" If his wife were to die do you think he would marry you? " he asked presently.

" I am certain—I know he would," I answered. " He has told me so more than once."

What a relief it was to know that my father knew now, and that he forgave me. It made me feel extraordinarily happy. Suddenly a thought occurred to me.

" Where is Lionel now? " I asked him. " Hasn't he been conscripted? "

It was strange that during those weeks in the nursing home we had not once spoken about Lionel.

" Why, yes," he replied quickly. " I thought you knew. He had to join up at last, and they made him a captain right away. He is in the A.S.C., at " (he mentioned a depôt near London). " He is adjutant."

A captain. Lionel. And adjutant. And Henry, who had been fighting for two years, still only a subaltern! I could have laughed aloud. Lionel deserved a Wangler's Medal. But perhaps later he would be transferred to some fighting force. I hoped he would be. Even if he remained in the A.S.C. and was sent to France he would see some of the fighting, some of the " fun "—unless he bluffed the medical board again (as I knew he must have done) and got kept at the Base. There he might be detailed to walk up and down a quay, become a M.L.O., and finish by getting his D.S.O. like that red-faced major.

Those weeks spent with my father at Southsea were wonderfully pleasant weeks, but I knew they must end soon. They ended sooner than I had expected, for after reporting I was again ordered out to France.

Should I meet Rupert? That was the first thought which came to me. And little Gwen, I wanted to see her again. She had written to me regularly while I was on sick leave, and told me as much as she dared to about what was happening. She had been driving an ambulance in different parts of France, and wondered why they kept on moving her from place to place. So far she had come through it all without a scratch, and that sense of fear, or nerves, had not returned.

"There is something very important I want to ask you," she said in the last letter I had from her, "but I can't put it in writing. Do tell me when you are coming out—if you do come out again. I want to see you most frightfully. I can't tell you how I have missed you during all these weeks, my own darling."

Poor Gwen. Such a lonely little person. She had told me she had no relatives, and an invalid mother. I was her only friend in the world, she said. It was pathetic.

That time they sent me to Marseilles. Our boat was shot at by a submarine which appeared on the surface suddenly—we crossed by day—but the torpedo went several yards behind us. The sensation while watching the torpedo coming at us through the water was most peculiar. And, when

it missed, everybody began to laugh. What a funny race we are. I am sure the French or the Germans or the people of any race but ours would not have laughed—they might have sworn. The submarine was expected to fire again. Instead, it submerged itself.

CHAPTER X

Some days after my arrival in Marseilles I got a letter from Rupert, forwarded from home.

He was still "somewhere in France," and said jokingly that he had been "wounded in the thumb, but not mortally." He expected his seniority soon, and explained why he had again been silent so long. He had done a lot of flying and intelligence work, and, though due for leave, would not apply for it until he knew my movements. If I were coming to France again he "simply must see me," so would not want to go to England.

Then I was told to report in Paris. At once I wrote telling Rupert this, and suggesting that he might spend his leave, or some of it, in Paris. I got a letter a few days later telling me that his leave had been granted and he would be in Paris by the time the letter reached me. He would stay at an hotel in Rue de Rivoli.

And that was where we spent our deferred honeymoon. We called it our honeymoon, and if married people's honeymoons resemble paradise as closely as ours resembled it . . . if there be a paradise . . .

Dreadful, you will say. So wicked. So immoral. Living in sin like that. But you who say that saw nothing of the war, or you would not say it, so you don't understand how the war (as I have already said)

changed us. You are not, therefore, qualified to pass judgment. I had never before been in Paris, and, seeing what happened afterwards, I am not anxious to stay in Paris again.

The work we drivers had to do there was much less strenuous than ambulance driving up the line, though most of our drivers who had not been in the danger zone grumbled continually. I found myself with plenty of spare time, particularly in the afternoons, and this enabled me to run out to the Bois and to Versailles and other delightful spots with Rupert, and remain there sometimes several hours.

Does marriage kill love? I wonder. I have heard women—and men too—say that it kills love in less than a year. But it is wrong to generalize. A Frenchwoman who knew that Rupert and I were not married said to me one day, nodding her wise old head:

"Never marry, mademoiselle. Remain as you are, and your love for each other will last for ever."

Meanwhile Paris was in a state of turmoil. The Germans, repulsed in their attempts to reach the city, had begun to drop shells into it from a distance of eighty miles (so it was said)—only an occasional shell, but an occasional shell the size of those fired by Big Bertha—as the men nick-named the enormous German gun—tended to demoralize the civilian population.

Indeed, Paris at that time afforded a strange study in contrasts—all the war did that to some extent. In the slum districts the poor people looked upon the war as an act of God, and told you so quite seriously. "It is a great punishment for our sins from the good

God," one woman said to me who had already lost five sons and was sending her sixth and last to be slaughtered.

"The good God." It was hard not to laugh at the thought of the poor creature having been so wicked that the good God deemed it necessary to murder all her sons—the vengeance of God indeed! They were patient and resigned, those ill-starred folk, and one could not but admire their stoicism. Among the well-to-do folk there were many shirkers—*embusqués* the French called them—just as there were in England. Most of them had money and tried to forget the war by spending money freely and attempting to be dissipated. But reckless dissipation, if ever justified, is justifiable only among men who, alive to-day, know that to-morrow they may be dead, and that almost for certain they will be dead in a few weeks' time at most. Many of our young officers were like that in Paris, determined to squeeze the last ounces of pleasure out of life during the brief time they had still to live. Particularly the Flying Corps, as it was then called. Most of the officers were little more than children; even the captains and some of the majors looked as though they had just come out of a school-room. And it was said that the 'planes they were made to fly were many of them un-airworthy.

Before, while in Rouen, I had become acquainted with a Flying Corps officer who, as he wore no badges, and said nothing about himself, I mistook for a subaltern. Quiet and unassuming, and, curiously enough, religious, he was the type of man that no woman can help liking. By the way he talked I judged him to be not greatly interested in

the war, though, of course, anxious to do his bit. Each time I tried to focus our conversation on himself, he somehow managed to change the subject. What perhaps mostly appealed to me was the fact that he did not attempt to flirt. I had grown so tired of men of the " flirtatious " type.

Not long after he had left, to go up the line, I received a packet of English newspapers from my father, who sent me papers generally once a week. What my amazement was you can imagine when, in several of the papers, I found large portraits—some of them full-page portraits—of the Flying Corps officer with whom I had become so friendly. Under the pictures was printed :

Major Hawker, D.S.O., who has been awarded the Victoria Cross.

And then there followed a detailed account of the wonderful deeds of valour he had performed.

We met a heroine in Paris during our " honeymoon," a French heroine, Mademoiselle Moreau, who had been decorated at the British Embassy with a medal for her wonderful courage in rescuing British wounded under fire. She, too, was quiet and unassuming, and the last thing in the world she wanted to talk about was what she had done. Such a pretty girl. I was told that half the men whose lives she had saved had ended by falling in love with her, and I am sure that must have been true. I almost myself fell in love with her beautiful dark eyes and smooth complexion and glorious hair. I dreaded that Rupert might fall a victim to her charms,

and I believe he almost did, though he was proof against the attractions of most pretty women.

When returning from duty late one night, I saw a curious sight. An in-aid-of ball given by a French Society woman in her big house in a fashionable boulevard was just over, and the guests, French and British, were pouring out, chattering and laughing.

In a narrow street branching off the boulevard is—or was—a notorious *maison de tolérance*. I thought that after my years of war nothing remained that could astonish me, but I was mistaken. In amazement I saw quite a lot, certainly over a dozen, of the smart-looking men who had come away from the ball—where they must have danced with beautiful and refined women—push their way in through the green-baize doors of that horrible red-lamp establishment. That they could do so on such a night struck me as revolting.

Which reminds me of an incident that amused me—it might not have amused me had I been sleeping in the women's barracks. The women who were sleeping there almost mutinied.

Some of them having complained that the bedroom furniture supplied was inadequate, worn-out and "disgraceful," the barrack warden was ordered to provide something better. Being a Scotsman and none too well disposed towards the women, who had harried him rather too much, he bought up "a cheap line of second-hand furniture and equipment from a newly dismantled house"—that was his description of it.

All might have been well, had not the women

accidentally discovered the "dismantled house" to be the lowest brothel in the town, recently suppressed for "irregularity of management and conduct."

The warden was severely reprimanded, and new furniture was provided. Yet even then the incensed women were not completely pacified.

Yes, the war provided humorous incident of one sort and another. In Paris a driver helped to add to it. She had a room on an upper floor of a queer little hotel in a back street in Clichy, where also were billeted some Australian N.C.O.'s. On coming in late one night she found, to her annoyance, that the morning's slops in her room had not been emptied.

The chambermaid had gone to bed, so what was to be done? Suddenly she remembered that residents in that Bohemian street sometimes emptied their slops out of the window into the street. So why not do as they did?

Opening her window, she cautiously held the full vessel out at arm's length, then gave it a jerk to empty it. As she did so the handle broke off and the vessel with its contents crashed through a glass roof below into a room where a party of Anzacs were playing jack-pot.

At once the whole place was in an uproar. The Australians swarmed up the stairs, thirsting to wreak vengeance on—somebody.

But they never found the somebody, for she had locked her door at once and switched off the light and jumped into bed.

Next morning she heard all about it, and expressed her indignation that anybody should have done such

a thing. The language of those Australians, she assured me, was too awful to listen to.

In spite of all that was said and written about the *entente cordiale* and the wonderful friendship which the war had cemented between British and French, such friendship never existed—never began to exist. Our Tommies liked the Frenchwomen and the French girls, but cordially disliked the *poilus*, and Frenchmen as a body. In two towns I was in French and English shared the same barracks; yet they never fraternized. Officers and "other ranks" of both nations made no disguise of cold-shouldering each the other. You would now and again see a British officer chatting in a *café* or an *estaminet* with a French officer, or a Tommy with a *poilu*, but such sights were rare. Nor was lack of knowledge of the languages the cause, for we could make ourselves understood, and so could the French. And the women war-workers were the same. Ours disliked the French and the French disliked ours. The French did not, I think, understand our ways and habits; I think they thought us rather mad. They were puzzled and astonished and indignant that we English were always laughing and joking no matter how serious the situation. Our girls played games and our men played football within range of the enemy's guns. That I know amazed the French. The matron of a French hospital told me that she considered it to be an insult to the dead!

Yet I would say, in justice to the French, that the offensive manner and the aggressiveness of some of our officers afforded them cause for complaint. Many a time I have heard an English officer bawling in English at a Frenchman, as though by bawling he

would make him understand. Others would use detestable adjectives when the Frenchman could not understand what was being said to him—but there was not a Frenchman who did not know the meaning of those adjectives. All that, of course, created bad blood. There are, unfortunately, cads in every nation, and a handful of cads can greatly increase any ill-feeling that may exist between nations.

Rupert's leave was coming to an end—had all British officers possessed his tact the alleged *entente* might have become a reality—when dreadful news reached me. I had not read it in the newspapers, but my father sent me the cutting.

My brother Henry was "reported missing, believed killed."

I had known that it must come, that day we had kissed each other good-bye on the platform of the little wayside station close to our home. Nothing but a miracle, I knew then, could save any regular officer of his rank from being killed in the fearful struggle just beginning—the subalterns and "other ranks" bore the brunt of the fighting. During the past two years, indeed, I had wondered how he had managed to escape, for his regiment had been in many engagements. And always at the back of my mind had lain the hope that the miracle would come about—that Henry would come through in safety.

"Believed killed." That "believed" comforted me a little, gave me hope. And Rupert—shall I ever forget his immense sympathy and the consolation he afforded me? But for him I should have broken down and been unable to carry on. Death had seemed a commonplace thing until now. One had

seen so much of it. I had thought I had grown callous, it affected me so little, but now . . .

Rupert took me in his arms and kissed me again and again. He didn't say much then. He knew that I would understand how deeply he felt for me better than if he poured forth expressions of sorrow for my misery. I couldn't imagine Henry dead. It seemed at first impossible. And some days passed before I could bring myself to write to my father and to my mother. I thought it best to write to each separately.

I was with Rupert in the hotel. Our room overlooked the Rue de Rivoli. The window was open. From a distance came the rhythmic tramp of marching men. Nearer and nearer. Louder and louder. As they passed they broke into a chorus—that too-familiar chorus:

> "Ma-de-moi-selle from Armentières,
> She hasn't been kissed for years and years,
> Ma-de-moi-selle from Armentières,
> She hasn't been . . ."

More troops on their way up to the shambles. More men—ever more men—to be smashed and mangled and blinded and rendered insane.

I thought again of my brother.

"Christ in Heaven!"

That driver's blasphemous exclamation burst from me. I couldn't help it. I jumped up and slammed down the window. I couldn't bear this horror any longer—I couldn't. When would it all end? Or would it ever end?

CHAPTER XI

SUMMER had gone by. I had not seen Rupert since that exquisite time in Paris which had ended with the tragic news about Henry, but I had heard of him fairly often. He was somewhere in the region of Arras or Bethune, I had reason to believe. He had been flying, he said. He did not tell me that he had been flying over enemy country and dropped there disguised as a German—he spoke German like a native; he dared not tell me that in any case. And had he done so I should not have slept at night.

And Henry was still missing and believed killed.

Christmas was approaching. Never shall I forget the intense cold of those winters in France. Driving became at times almost agonizing, though we smothered our faces in creams and other cosmetics as many of the air pilots did. Had we not, our faces would soon have been skinless. The 'planes in use then were not covered in.

We were stationed close to a Flying Corps headquarters, and many of their young officers had scraped acquaintance with us. They probably were glad to meet women to talk to who had not designs on their slender purses. One or two proposed to me, and I refused them one after another, as tactfully as I could, in order not to hurt their feelings. For I would not for worlds willingly have hurt their feelings. They were such nice little boys, and, my heaven, how

brave, how reckless! Every few days one or more would be reported missing. One saw them fly up into the air in their roaring machines, and wondered if they would come back. So many never did. It meant one place less at dinner in their mess, two places, perhaps three. That was all. Those who remained carried on as though nothing unusual had happened. To-morrow it might be their turn. They knew that well enough; but it seemed not to worry them.

Little Gwen was with me again. We were both honoured with an invitation to dine in the Flying Corps mess on Christmas night—or was it New Year's Eve? I forget.

But I shall not forget that evening. The boys must all have thought it would be their last Christmas, and they meant to make the most of it. They received us most graciously, most of them rather shyly. Their C.O. looked about my own age. Indeed, I could almost have imagined myself in peace-time giving him a box of chocolates or a jack-knife as a Christmas present! Yet he was, I could see, the right man in the right place—what a lot of men, not all of them young, were the wrong men in the wrong places!

That dinner was a banquet. And the wines—sherry, Moët and Chandon and Pol Roger in lashings—the King's health—more port—"Our guests." . . .

There was not much shyness left by then. In the ante-room they grew noisy, uproarious. There was a piano and somebody played, played extremely well. And no wonder, seeing that before the war he had qualified in the Royal College of Music.

And singing. Mostly choruses. And dancing—such dancing. . . .

Some of them grew confidential, told me about themselves, their homes, their schools, the games they played before the war. One of them loved his lovely sister—went into his room specially to get her photograph to show to me. One or two furtively produced from some pocket a photograph of some bit of fluff with whom, they assured me, they were "hopelessly in love." Poor kids! They didn't know what love meant. But I didn't tell them so. More than one of them kissed me while we danced, and then half apologized. Said they couldn't help it. One declared he had done it "by accident" and hoped I would forgive him. I would have forgiven them anything that night. The C.O., while dancing with me, made excuses for some of them.

"Christmas, you know," he said. "One has to give them their heads a bit on a night like this."

A sedate young man, and I liked him. He was killed a month later.

To one bright youth it suddenly occurred that we might like a joy flight. The suggestion met with unanimous approval. I caught Gwen's eye, and saw her grimace, then laugh. Everyone was laughing. You would have thought not one of them had a care in the world. The C.O. had left the room, or he might have vetoed the proposal.

I went over to Gwen.

"We shall have to go through with it," I said. "We can die only once! I hope that boy won't be our pilot," and I indicated a little fellow sitting in a corner muttering to himself—the effect of the excellent

champagne. I hated the idea of flying in pitch darkness with one of these lads just as much as Gwen did.

Two of them had left the ante-room to go out to the sheds. They were away a longish time. They came back at last looking disappointed. The sheds were locked, they said, and the sergeant-major had the key. And they couldn't find the sergeant-major.

I felt I could have hugged that sergeant-major. No doubt he had guessed that on Christmas night anything might happen!

. . . . . .

The chief danger in night driving was the danger from shell-holes. One had to drive with extreme care, and you can drive with extreme care only when your lamps shine brightly, and our headlights refused to shine brightly unless we drove fast. Several times we overtook A.S.C. horse transport moving up with supplies, and then I made an interesting discovery. If, when shrapnel came over, the horse drivers carried on as usual, and as though nothing unusual were happening, the horses carried on as usual. But if, as happened once or twice, the drivers became excited and, to speak plainly, got the wind up, at once the horses would get their heads up and grow restless, almost unmanageable. I thought that was curious. It showed that in some way the drivers' fear or "nerves" transferred itself to their horses.

And here I would like to say a word about the A.S.C. Even during the war they were the butt of many gibes. At home they were looked down on by the fighting units. At the Bases in France the

civilians seemed to think that all that the A.S.C. had to do was to drive about the town with lorry loads of rations, live on the fat of the land themselves, and not run any risks. But we who saw the work they did right up near the line, knew better. Twice I saw an A.S.C. motor-lorry blown sky high, and the drivers killed. At "suicide corner," as it was aptly nicknamed, A.S.C. casualties were considerable, I was told. And the A.S.C. never spared themselves. No matter what happened, those rations, or that munition, had to be "got there," and "get there" they did, by one means or another. It was said that on the whole the mules behaved better than the horses. Nothing seemed to upset a mule or disturb its equanimity. Even a sergeant whom I had heard declare that a mule could stand on one leg and lash out with the remaining three, assured me that under fire mules were "less temperamental like than 'orses."

A curious crowd, the A.S.C. They were of all ages, some of them quite old, and they appeared to have belonged to every imaginable profession and calling and trade before they joined up, and to have been collected from every corner of the world. Ourselves under A.S.C. orders, we had to mix to some extent with the A.S.C. officers and drivers, motor transport, horse transport and supplies. The oldest officer of the corps whom I met admitted to being seventy. His father, he told me, had been a bricklayer—and he was proud of it.

"And I can tell you this, miss," he said to me one day in a stage whisper, "those Sanitary Section coves are not one bit of blarsted good."

Often there was friction between the Sanitary Section and the A.S.C.—perhaps because the A.S.C.'s nickname for the Sanitary Section was not a pretty one.

Oh, that winter! The wet. The fog. Worst of all the mud. And the smell of that mud—until it froze hard. What made it smell like that, even behind the lines? Where battles had been fought the smell was different. One could "taste" the smell, if you understand what I mean. In battlefield mud was a "flavour" which seemed to penetrate right up one's nostrils and stay there. It became worse afterwards, as I shall explain later.

In the winter, too, rats would abandon the trenches to some extent and work backwards, and so molest us, or rather, raid our stores. Perhaps even they found the trenches too intensely cold. But one grew accustomed to them as to all else. In the hot weather there had been worse things than rats, in spite of the pains we were at to keep them out, and the efforts of the disinfecting and de-lousing people. I suppose there is really nothing to which one cannot force oneself to become inured.

It was during that winter that a young Canadian threw away his life, close to where we were. He had had one or two "quick ones" (drinks), I was told, and out of bravado offered to bet any man five francs that he would expose himself above a trench for some seconds, or it may have been a minute, though enemy snipers were believed to be watching. Some of his companions were fools enough to accept the bet, and he clambered up and stood there. Not a shot was fired. I have always believed that the

German snipers must have guessed what had happened, and intentionally held their fire.

"And to show I didn't do it to get your bloody money," he exclaimed when back in the trench, "I'll do it again for nothing."

He clambered up once more—and was shot dead.

After that—so lacking in humour were some of the authorities—an order was issued that any officer or other rank wilfully exposing himself to the enemy would be court-martialed. Even we women got that order in a different form.

We constantly heard reports of enemy frightfulness, and, as I moved about a good deal in country which the enemy had occupied, I determined to find out if those reports were true. So in villages where horrible outrages were said to have been perpetrated I made very careful inquiries.

"Oh, yes," I was told, "those outrages were committed, there was no doubt of that—but not here. They took place . . ." and some village farther on would be named. But when I came to that village I received the same reply. Always there had been frightfulness, everybody knew that, but it was—not here. Always somewhere else, only a few miles away. Not once was I able to find a spot where crimes of frightfulness had actually taken place.

And so I wondered if those reports were false, or at least exaggerated. I hoped they were. The enemy spread reports that we committed acts of frightfulness, and I never came across a case of British frightfulness either. I suppose the odious maxim that "all is fair in love and war" prevailed on both sides, and so it was considered fair to spread broad-

cast atrocious lies. A friend of mine of social importance in England was rung up one day by a Person of Importance and asked to spread a terrible story.

"But is it true?" she asked.

"Don't worry about that," came the reply. "Just tell it to your friends—say you have it on good authority. That is all I ask."

She did not. A week or so later the story was told to her by an acquaintance who said she had it "on the best authority."

Thus were falsehoods spread and the flames of hatred fanned.

The transport drivers and some of the war correspondents saw far more of the war than the fighting troops, because they moved constantly in different parts of the line. I say "some" of the correspondents, because there were some who remained at the Bases in comfortable hotels, or in billets far behind the lines, and founded their reports on scraps of news gathered from various sources, reliable and unreliable. The rest of the "news" they evolved from their imagination. During the early months of the war three young men used to come into the hospital where I was nursing, in the hope of gleaning news from the wounded. Their passports were pre-war, yet for quite a long time they bluffed both French and British military authorities and civilian officials, and so saw what they wanted to see. Suddenly they disappeared, and we heard that Kitchener had packed them back to England. As the war progressed few correspondents were allowed to get near the front.

Spring was again in sight, and with its approach

came the great thaw, and then the mud, the everlasting hateful mud increased. It became a nightmare. One lived surrounded by it. Many times even our light cars got stuck and had to be hauled out. Deep holes in the roads could not be seen because they were full to the brim with mud; yet one was supposed to avoid them and one got ticked off if one did not. There is a bit of road in France, somewhere near St. Quentin, I think, that is metalled with live shells, unless they have since been removed. For one night when ammunition was being rushed up to the front, twenty or so yards of roadway were found to have collapsed, smashed up by a shell or shells. There was nothing near at hand with which to repair it, and the ammunition couldn't wait. So after a brief consultation it was decided to mend the road with the only available "material," and that material was live shells. I wonder what that bit of road cost the Government, and if the Government ever heard of that Company Commander's brain wave?

The last time I drove through Albert a great statue at the top of the church had been hit by a shell, which, however, had not dislodged it. The image had fallen forward, and stopped when it reached a right angle, where it lay in a horizontal position, staring down at the earth.

Some of the French people believed that God had arrested its fall, as it was a sacred statue. I heard afterwards that some bright young Australians climbed to the top of the church and wired the statue to prevent its falling further, and that they intended, on the day the war ended, to cut the wires and let the statue crash—and thus lead the French to imagine that

a second miracle had happened. Whether they ever did so I do not know.

I saw a good deal of the Australians from first to last, and though I am told they fought well and were wonderfully brave—but what troops were not brave?—I couldn't bring myself to like them. They were so rough and so uncouth—at least those I came across. They had no respect for women, and to walk alone after dark near where they were billeted was to court being insulted—to say the least. They would accost one openly as though one were a street walker, and sometimes make abominable suggestions before one could get away from them. They were as thick-skinned as their own kangaroos, thicker-skinned probably. Which astonished me, for the New Zealanders were not like that. They were courteous and considerate, and I never knew them solicit any woman in khaki. The French, too, hated the Australians, though both Australians and Americans squandered money recklessly. Personally I liked the Americans very much, officers and other ranks. Maybe I was lucky enough to meet the right "bunch."

CHAPTER XII

I GOT a shock one day.

Gwen came into my room when I was alone—we were in huts just then—put her arms round my neck, kissed me, and then whispered into my ear:

"Connie, I want a man most frightfully."

Though I no longer called myself a moral woman, "a respectable woman" as they would have said at home, I was horrified. Gwen had seemed to me to be so different from other girls I had been meeting, and so clean-minded. She had high ideals, too, and was the last girl I should have expected to say a thing like that—or feel like that. So the war atmosphere—that atmosphere which destroyed the souls of many of us, as it destroyed the bodies of others—had engulfed her too.

For a minute or two I couldn't answer. I held her close. I could feel her rapid breathing as she clung to me.

"I can't help it, Connie," she went on, as I remained silent. "I suppose you are shocked. It has been coming on gradually, this feeling, this desire, though I didn't dare tell you. I feared I might lose your friendship—if you knew. But to-night something overpowered me and I felt I just *must* tell you. Not angry with me, are you?"

Angry! Who was I to be angry or shocked? Though in my case it was different. I had

surrendered because I loved Rupert. But Gwen was not in love. She did not pretend to be. With her it was merely animal desire.

"Gwen," I said at last, "you have upset me. But of course I am not angry, nor am I going to be nasty to you, as you seem to expect. I may be some things, but I am not a hypocrite. Tell me; when did you begin to feel—like that?"

She unbosomed to me herself then. She had first felt like that the first time she had been almost under shell-fire, that night, months ago, when she had suddenly found herself, her courage, her nerve—had "become brave," as she called it. Since then the desire had gradually increased. So what was she to do? She wanted me to tell her. Said I must tell her at once.

Had I been a man, and she a man, we should probably both have laughed, and, had we been stationed at a Base, have directed her to one of those abominable houses; or perhaps to some little girl in an *estaminet* who did that sort of thing. With we women it was different. It meant so much more. It might even mean an entire change of life—disgrace—ostracism. I was completely at a loss what to advise.

But the thing had to be faced. I couldn't begin to preach to her, tell her how wrong it was, how sinful to think of that sort of thing—I, of all people. Had she known nothing about me I might have lectured her, warned her. But she knew everything about me, for I had made her my confidante.

Then I began to feel annoyed.

"Confound her," I said to myself. "Why can't she behave as she ought to?"

My thought must have flashed into her brain, for the next moment she said:

"I suppose you think I ought to behave myself. I have tried to, darling, really and truly I have—and I have done nothing wrong as yet."

"Then why can't you go on doing nothing wrong, as you call it?"

"Why didn't you, Connie?"

That was a nasty thrust.

"Because I was in love," I said simply. "You are not in love. You want—just that. Any man would do for you, young or old or middle-aged. It is detestable to think about. You are like so many of the men we see out here who go to those horrid houses. I passed a queue of them the other night outside a red-lamp house. Ouch! How they can!"

"I didn't ask you to lecture me, Connie," she answered. "I asked you to advise me. There is nobody else I could ask, nobody I would dare ask. But you are such a darling. . . ."

My brain began to work quickly. Something must be done, some advice be given—but what? Subconsciously I began to think of the young officers I knew. . . . Gwen couldn't go on like this. . . . If I didn't advise her she would act without telling me, do something rash or foolish, get hold of some dreadful person perhaps . . . there were nasty people among the officers, good soldiers no doubt, but . . . I thought of that hospital where many of them were sent. . . . I thought of Gwen being sent home . . . ruined in health for life. . . .

She was standing looking down at me where I sat, waiting for me to speak.

" Look here, darling," I said at last, pulling her on to my knee and kissing her. " This thing has to be faced. Heaven knows what your friends and my friends at home would say if they could hear what I am going to say. . ."

" They can't hear so it doesn't matter," she cut in quickly. " Go on. Only do be quick about it."

Then I told her. I knew a charming young subaltern, nice-minded, well-bred, rather shy. Good-looking, too, and considerate. I had reason to believe that in France he had lived a clean life—one of the nurses had told me so, though I don't know how she knew. He was alone in a cosy billet close to us, and spent his spare time in reading. I did not for a moment suppose that he had never approached a woman . . . but . . .

It could be arranged without his suspecting anything. I told her that I would arrange it. I would introduce him to her. . . . I knew that he would like her. She was just the sort of little girl to appeal to him, unless I was much mistaken.

You think me a horrible woman, you people who sat safely at home? And so do you men who got no nearer to the danger zone than Rouen, or perhaps Abbeville or Amiens, because you convinced the Powers that Were that you were indispensable at your Base. At least I expect you do. I can hear you at your dinner-parties declaring that this book is " nothin' but a pack of lies," that you " don't believe the woman went out there at all," and I can hear indignant V.A.D.'s and Waacs and other women workers, fearful lest their own virtue should be held suspect, emphatically contradicting every

statement that I have made. But, all the same, you know that what I say is true—true as regards those of us who went through it all, not true, perhaps, concerning those who were all the time far behind the lines. And you men who stayed miles behind the lines need not talk. If your wives knew how you conducted yourselves, particularly those among you who in those war years were already middle-aged or elderly, how astonished they would be—how terribly upset and shocked. Yet I expect that most of them would forgive you, because we women were born to forgive our menfolk.

. . . . . .

The war was well advanced when I first saw gassed men. And never will that awful spectacle be blotted from my memory. It was almost dark, and they lay in rows along both sides of a road between two lines of poplars. Though the engine of my car was running—and it was not a silent engine—I could hear them plainly. What that sound was like I cannot describe. It was unlike any sound I had ever heard before, and I hope that I may not live to hear it again; the coughing of a flock of sheep is the nearest approach to it that I can think of. We helped the orderlies, and other soldiers who stood by, to lift them on to stretchers and slide the stretchers into the cars, and all the while, and all the way back to the tents, that heart-rending gasping for life went on. Mercifully, some of them died on the way. Some seemed to suffer less agony if we propped them in a sitting posture instead of letting them lie flat. And the smell of the gas which clung about their clothes.

The memory of it even now makes me feel almost sick.

I have a theory as regards gas. Only a woman's theory, but women's theories, you know, sometimes prove to be correct. There is, as I write these lines, an agitation to outlaw poison gas in war. In the next war—if it ever comes, which God forbid—poison gas must be banned by every nation taking part in it. It must be outlawed now. Its manufacture must be stopped. It is too horrible. Too inhuman. That is what the agitators say.

On the contrary, because it is too horrible and too inhuman its manufacture must *not* be stopped. War is an organized, carefully premeditated atrocity. Who premeditates and organizes war? Certainly not those who will be foremost to take part in it, whose own lives will be endangered, who will themselves suffer loss financially. War is premeditated and organized by men who know that their own lives and the lives of those who are near and dear to them will not be endangered by it. War is organized by men who, whilst shouting about patriotism and the duty of every man to defend his own country and help to protect the weaker nations, know that they themselves are going to benefit by it enormously. Who were the men who directly benefited by the Great War? The men who took part in it either as victors or conquered? I live always with my ears open, and I know as well as you do who the Great People were whom the Great War benefited, who rubbed their hands when it started and would have regretted its ending had their avarice not by then been gratified.

"Go out and fight!" "Go and do your bit!" "What, not in khaki? You ought to be ashamed!" Thus spoke the war lords, who themselves remained at home. The nations were made the cats' paws. Everybody who could fight was pushed out and made to fight. The war lords knew that they themselves would be safe.

And so they will be in the next war if poison gas is outlawed.

Don't let it be outlawed. Increase its output. And let the whole world know that the poison gases being manufactured to-day are thirty times more powerful, more horrible, more deadly, than any that was used in the late war. Tell the world the truth—that if we have another war not the fighting men alone, but every civilian in every town in every country engaged in the war, not excepting the war lords and their kinsfolk and all their belongings, will be put out of existence, and then see if any human being who is not a maniac will lift a finger to help to start a war. Oh, no, there will be no more war so long as that terror, the terror of poison gas, hangs like the sword of Damocles over the heads of men who, if that terror were removed, would be potential war promoters. And who are the men who so much want to outlaw poison gas? They pose as advocates of humanity, express horror at the thought of their fellow-creatures being done to death in lingering internal agony; yet if they knew that another war would raise them on a pinnacle of wealth and that during its progress they themselves could live in safety, far from the scenes of carnage, they would advocate war to-morrow.

I have spoken about fear. The more I saw of the war the more convinced I became that very few men indeed are cowards, no matter to what nation they may belong. And by the word men I mean also women. But I believe that the great majority of us, both men and women, were afraid of being afraid when the crisis came. And we were afraid that others would think we were afraid.

I have many times tried to analyse what fear, or what we call fear, actually is. And what I am now sure of is that it is an excess of uncontrollable emotion. I have seen men literally trembling with this uncontrollable emotion before rising to make a speech at a big public dinner—men, that is, who were unaccustomed to public speech-making. I have seen actors, even famous actors, trembling in the same way before the curtain went up on a first-night performance. I have seen steeplechase-riders shivering through uncontrollable emotion while saddling their mounts—amateur riders, I will admit—yet no sooner were they in the saddle than they became calm and collected. And during the war I saw men sitting on their horses, with chattering teeth, not long before they charged. Uncontrollable emotion, suppressed excitement, *crise de nerfs*, call it what you like. It was not fear, any more than it was fear that made a corporal tremble from head to foot and become "dithery" one afternoon while shrapnel was coming over; because some time afterwards that corporal was decorated for exceptional valour in the field.

A sight which made a deep impression on me was the expression in the faces of some infantry just back from a bayonet charge, its sole British survivors.

The lines about their tight-set jaws, the look in their eyes, in the eyes of all of them—if those men were not demented, temporarily stark and staring mad, then nobody ever has been stark and staring mad. I could not look at them for long. They almost made my heart stop. Yet when I saw them some days later the expression was no longer there; they were again completely normal.

Standing near, I happened to overhear the talk of one or two.

" Yes," one of them was saying, " I 'ear from me old missis larst night, an' she tell me them dahlias I told yer abaht, Bill, was comin' on fine. Five of 'em's purple and the rest is . . ."

And another:

"An' so 'e says ter me, ' Yer mustn't write in yer letters 'ome as the orficers is doin' their best,' 'e says; ' but yer might say ' ('e was jokin', like, was the Capt'in), ' yer might say as 'ow the orficers loves bein' orderly orficers, an' readin' *King's Regs.*, an' so on,' 'e says."

" And what did you say, Tom? "

" Me? Oh, I says to 'im, ' Well, sir,' I says, ' I didn't say as *you* was doin' yer best, sir '—an' 'e didn't 'arf laugh; I wonder why? "

A third was explaining how he had caught a fox cub and was making a little cage for it out of a ration box, so that one of his " mates," going on leave, could take it home to his children.

" The kiddies'll like that 'ere French fox. . . ."

And to think that the week before those simple-minded men had been murdering their fellow-creatures in a frenzy of maniacal passion!

CHAPTER XIII

DURING the war actors and singers serving in the army, and all who before had been entertainers of any sort, seemed to cling together. It used to be said that any officer or " other rank " discovered, on his landing in France for the first time, to be an entertainer, was at once ear-marked for a Base, there to amuse senior officers and staff officers! I do not say that that was true.

Though there were play-actors who made good officers, the members of that profession did not, as a whole, show up well during the war; by that I mean that many sound and fit young actors did not join up until conscripted—a proportion of them even then escaped service. Professional footballers, too, might have done better, and certain cricketers whose names now shout at us from the newspaper placards managed to shirk serving. This I was told by more than one M.O. On the other hand, clerks and shop-assistants and other sedentary workers did, many of them, more than their share, which was surprising. And kept their heads, too, which was more surprising. I had been brought up among people in the habit of speaking contemptuously of young men of the clerk type and the shop-assistant type (if ever they condescended to think about such folk). Having seen how those " creatures " conducted themselves during the war, the grit they possessed and the

courage they displayed, I hold them now in very high esteem. They had nothing to gain by joining up early, and a great deal to lose. And many of them did lose a great deal.

The ghastly winter was coming to an end—never had I believed such cold to be possible—and there were rumours of a big offensive. After the monotony and gloom and general depression and the disappointments of the past few months the knowledge that something was at last going to happen was inspiriting. How those men in the trenches had been able to survive the frightful cold and the mud and all the other abominations has always seemed to me to be miraculous. I have travelled a great deal since the war, and the cold of places like northern Canada and the northern States is as nothing by comparison.

Rupert and I had met several times, and, as he put it, " renewed our honeymoon." I suppose I hardly need say that no man but Rupert ever attracted me other than platonically. He was the one man in my life to whom I could abandon myself wholly, for whom I would have done anything in the world—given my life, had that been necessary. The reason we were able to meet was that he came occasionally to report at the headquarters where I was stationed during the winter. His work of spying—" intelligence work " he called it—must have been interesting, and to some extent exciting, but never would he tell me what it was or where he had been.

" You might talk about it in your sleep," he said when one day I tried to draw him out. " And you would not be the first to reveal secrets whilst asleep."

I had a letter from my mother at about that time.

She rarely wrote. When she did her letters usually had a sting in them. This one had a big sting. Certainly she did not beat about the bush.

"DEAR CONNIE," she wrote, "I have heard from somebody who has seen a good deal of you and knows all that you are doing, that you have been living with a man, that you live with him still sometimes—in sin. I am not going to say what I think about you, how shocked and utterly disgusted I am that a daughter of mine, a daughter for whom I have done so much, for whom I have sacrificed a great part of my life, should repay me by becoming a common prostitute. Your father has tried to defend you, make excuses for you; but then ever since I had the misfortune to marry him I have known all about his secret life and his intrigues. He and I no longer speak. I consider you to be no longer a daughter of mine, and I hope never to see you again. Please do not ever attempt to come to the Rectory, for I have given orders that you are not to be admitted. If your father still wishes to see you I cannot prevent his doing so. But he shall never see you here if I can prevent it. And I shall prevent it.

"Your heart-broken MOTHER."

"Heart-broken." But for that word the letter would have infuriated me. My mother heart-broken! I had sometimes wondered if she had a heart at all. And the way she had treated my dear father from so far back as I could remember! One point in the letter did enrage me. That monstrous lie that my father had led a secret life and had intrigues. That I knew to be utterly false. I felt as I folded the letter that I could have struck my mother for saying such a thing.

But when Rupert had read it he looked serious.

"Who told her about you?" he said.

"I have not the slightest idea," I replied truthfully. "Some woman most likely."

"Probably. At the same time that letter makes me anxious. It won't do for that slander to get about amongst your friends. It would make things so unpleasant for you when you go on leave—and afterwards."

"Rupert, darling," I remember exclaiming, "how Victorian you are! Do you suppose I care two snaps what my so-called friends think or say about me? So long as I have you to love, and you go on loving me, that is all that matters so far as I am concerned. We can't marry, because the law prevents it. But we can love each other just the same. And as we were made for each other who can blame us if we live together?"

I told him about Gwen, and what I had done, and at first he was really indignant. If she had those feelings, he declared, that was her funeral and nobody else's. Certainly no concern of mine, and I had acted quite wrongly. I ought to have left her to look after herself, settle her own feelings, or if she wanted to give herself to a man, let her find her own man. Supposing her parents should come to know what I had done? Why, her father would come and murder me. . . .

I let him go on, watched him grow warmer and warmer. When at last he stopped, I marshalled my battery of arguments to prove that, in acting as I had, I had done what was best for Gwen. When I dropped a hint regarding that hospital to which soldiers afflicted with Disease were sent, and told him

the number who, I had been told, reported there weekly, he calmed down a little. It had been to save Gwen from risk of a far greater evil that I had affected the introduction.

" And when the war is over," I said, " she will go back to respectability, just as I and so many other women will, and nobody will be the wiser unless somebody ' splits ' about them."

" Somebody will split, you may be sure of that," he answered. " Hasn't somebody split about you already? I feel that I am to blame for dragging your name in the mud. And now, Connie, I have to talk about something else, something even more serious, for it has to do with the war. Connie, you can help me—I want your help. Can I depend on you? "

" Don't be silly," I replied. " If it is anything I can do."

" You can do it all right, but—it's not an easy job. You will have to assume a disguise. But nobody at all, not even the authorities, suspects what I propose doing with you."

" It sounds exciting. Do I dress up as a man? "

" No, as an old woman, and make up as an old woman. I have leave to draft you from your present job, or of course I shouldn't ask you."

" What has the old woman got to do? "

" To listen, look—and remember."

" Where? "

" In a mill on the outskirts of a forest. Come and look at my map, and I'll show you the exact spot."

That was all he said then, so far as I can recollect. Some days later I found myself in a loft up against

a roof. Since early morning I had been there, peering through an opening between planks forming the shell of the mill. I was watching a stretch of straight, monotonous road. The mill stood five hundred or so yards from the road, and about the same distance from an apparently unending forest. A high wind blew, had been blowing all day, and it whistled in the rooms beneath me. What I had been looking for had not come along, though there had been a lot of transport—lorries with supplies, lorries with ammunition, lorries with troops. It was now nearly dark, but Rupert had told me on no account to show a light.

I felt very cold, and the waiting and watching had been tedious in the extreme. It must have been past eleven when I heard somebody trying to get in. This did not surprise me, and I clambered down the ladder and went across the creaking floor. A flight of wooden steps outside the mill led from the ground up to the door. Above the howling wind somebody outside called three words in French, and I called out in the same tongue the words that Rupert had told me to. Then I pulled back the block bolt and the door flew open, blown in by the gale. Two men came quickly in—I could not see them against the black night—and I forced back the door behind them and pushed the bolt into its mortise. An electric torchlight flashed in my face, and remained there.

My heart beat very fast. Would they penetrate my disguise?

Then one of them spoke in French, and I replied in the *patois* of an old Frenchwoman. Questions were put to me in quick succession, but I was ready

with the answers. In reply to a question that I had been expecting I produced from under my old skirt the fat envelope which Rupert had given me, and placed it in the hand which emerged from the darkness.

"You have done well," said the voice, after the contents of the envelope had been examined. "Here is your reward. Come again on Tuesday, before daylight, and wait until we come—we may not come that day, or the next day, or the next. But you must wait. You will be well paid again."

He had rather a nice voice. After that he asked questions concerning our troops, mentioned units, inquired their whereabouts—mentioned Rupert's name and questioned me about him. I told him that my replies were "correct to the best of my knowledge," and that seemed to satisfy. The information I had given him had, of course, been entirely false.

As they opened the door to go, a terrific gust of wind tore in, almost carrying me off my feet. With difficulty I forced the door to when they had gone, then hurried up the ladder to the loft, ran across to the opening through which I had been staring all day, and flashed my electric torch five times in quick succession.

My task was done, and I lay down on the bare boards. I was cold and stiff and terribly tired, so tired that I knew I should soon be asleep. I believe I was asleep when something made me start up.

A smell of burning!

In a moment I was on my feet and clambering down the ladder. I could smell the smoke but could

not see it. It came from down below. Terrified, I ran to the door and thrust back the block bolt. The door would not open. It was fastened outside!

Now I could hear the fire crackling. Subconsciously I was aware that outside shots were being fired. Frenzied with terror as the door refused to yield, I began to cry out loudly. But the howling wind drowned my voice. Then all at once the door flew open. A light flashed in my eyes. I screamed. . . .

Someone seized me and the light went out. A hand was pressed upon my mouth and Rupert's voice shouted in my ear:

"Stop that damned noise!"

I was picked up and carried out, and down the flight of wooden steps. Close by was an unlighted car, and Rupert pushed me into it. Two men occupied the front seat. I could not see them in the darkness, but their legs got in my way. They sat in silence and motionless. The car shot away across the grass, then swerved into the road. Suddenly its headlights shone out. Rupert was beside me.

"A near escape," he said. "I didn't think they meant to burn their spy; but in war and love everything is justifiable, isn't it? Look."

The car swept round a curve. Away to the left a red glare was in the sky. The gale beat the flames of the blazing mill down upon the land and out across it in a crimson flag.

The glare lit up the inside of the car, and I almost cried out. Propped up on the seat facing us were two men in British uniforms. On their tunics there

was blood. Their mouths gaped. Their lifeless eyes seemed to stare into ours.

" What a glorious bit of luck," I heard Rupert saying. " The third fellow, who got away into the forest, has got the plans you gave him—the dud maps and plans ! "

CHAPTER XIV

DURING the months I had known him I had found out little about Rupert, because I had not tried to. He rarely spoke about himself or any of his relatives or friends, and it had not occurred to me that he might possess a title. Not until after the adventure which I have just described did he become communicative concerning himself. Then it was I learnt that he was closely related to an influential diplomat. He knew my father's cousins, also my father's old friend who on the outbreak of the war had suggested my doing my bit. Actually Rupert had at that time indirectly helped me to "enlist," little thinking that one day he would come to know me and that things would happen which had happened.

"Don't tell me that 'the world is very small,'" he said when he had told me this. "I hate platitudes and people who repeat them. But I have always found that one can't meet many people without discovering mutual acquaintances."

He was delighted with what I had done, he said. He had discovered—how, he did not explain—that three enemy spies were somewhere about, working in touch with each other, more or less, and wearing British uniforms. They had as accomplice an old Frenchwoman, who was able to supply them with certain plans and information. The whereabouts of

this old woman Rupert had discovered, and when arrested she had the plans on her. She assured him the spies had never actually seen her, so at once he decided to make somebody impersonate her—and at once thought of me. The packet he had given me contained false plans and incorrect information. His chief difficulty lay in discovering the day and the time when the spies would meet the old woman in the mill, and from which direction they would come. They might come in a car along the road, she told him, or out of the forest, or even across country.

So now I knew why Rupert had been able to "commandeer" me, how he came to have so free a hand. For months past he had virtually controlled my movements without my suspecting it.

"It seems dreadful that those spies should have tried to burn their accomplice," I happened to say to him. "I hate the phrase you used that day—'in war that all is justifiable.'"

He laughed.

"But all *is* fair in war—and love, Connie dear," he replied. "Spies have been caught who were spying for both sides and getting paid by both sides. I shall not be surprised if we find out presently that that old woman, too, was playing the double game. Those three spies—two of them I had to shoot in self-defence—probably suspected that their old woman would let them down after taking the money from them, and they therefore decided not to take any sporting chances."

"What will become of her now?"

"Don't ask me that. All I can tell you is that she will not be shot. And now, Connie, I have

another job of work for you if you care to undertake it; not so risky as the last—I can detail somebody else if you prefer not to do it. It will mean your going to London."

The prospect thrilled me, and I told him so. Somehow I longed to see London again. I wanted to see how things at home had changed; or if they had changed at all.

So then he unfolded his plan. He had thought it out himself, he said, and believed he had made it fool-proof. There was still in London a woman of foreign origin who before the war had been secretly notorious. Society had received her in those days, and she had known everybody. She still conducted her two establishments near Bond Street, though many people wondered why she was not interned. Rumours, of course, were rife. It was sometimes hinted that for years she had secretly been employed as procuress to certain prominent members of the Government, and to rich degenerates, and that she was herself very rich. It was also said that because of the knowledge she possessed concerning the private lives of people *haut placé*, none dared interfere with her.

"But I mean to interfere," Rupert said, "and you are going to help me. Most people have a weak spot, and this woman is no exception. I have discovered that what is often said of her is true—she loves having her fortune told. Every time a new charlatan comes along she at once consults her—or him. Well, you will be the next charlatan, and she will come to consult you. And when she comes you will ask her questions and tell her things—I will

coach you in what you will have to say and ask—which will, I am pretty sure, make her compromise herself and so force the Government either to intern her or hound her out of the country. For I am convinced that in London she is spying for the enemy, and keeping them posted in what is happening, so far as she is able to."

I left for England some days later. In London Rupert had a suite of rooms engaged for me, not far from Berkeley Square. They were on the first floor, and luxuriously furnished in Oriental style. The apartment in which I was to interview my client I myself draped, lighting it dimly in a manner which imparted to it an atmosphere of Eastern mystery.

One card only of invitation I had printed, an elaborate, expensive-looking affair with strange arabesques and geometrical figures and an incomprehensible cipher (incomprehensible to me, too), complete with an engraving of the pole star and some Egyptian hieroglyphics. This I posted to her in a registered envelope marked "Private and Confidential." Then I robed myself with scrupulous care in the trappings of the Eastern mystic and clairvoyante I was supposed to represent, and sat down and waited.

I waited only one day. Then my telephone rang, and I was told that a lady wished to make an appointment. No, she would not give her name. How soon could I see her?

This message was brought to me by a girl whom Rupert had appointed to act as my secretary—a cousin of his. I thought it diplomatic to say that I

was too busy to see anybody until early in the following week.

She kept her appointment to the minute, and was admitted by the Egyptian dressed in Egyptian costume whom I had hired from a London stores.

The dim light was so arranged that she could not see me distinctly, whereas I could see her face quite clearly. And what an evil face! Coarse, sensual, almost degraded. I could well imagine that she had been, and probably was still, one of the worst types of adventuress.

She was burning with curiosity to be told all about herself, her past and her future. Every question I put to her she answered readily. Not once or twice, but half a dozen times she unwittingly compromised herself. Concealed behind a curtain, my secretary took down in shorthand everything she said. For fully an hour I kept her there. Even then she showed no sign of wanting to end the interview. She kept on asking me questions, some of them quite extraordinary.

As soon as she had gone I sent a code telegram to Rupert. Two days later the woman disappeared from her shops. What happened to her or became of her I was not told.

Though I had been in London over a fortnight, I had not told my father. I could not go home, after that letter from my mother, so I had thought it best to let him think that I was still in France.

London had changed a good deal. The streets had grown darker than ever at night. Air raids were dreaded more than before, and formed one of

the principal topics of conversation. One felt, too, that in spite of their outward calm the public had turned panicky. The man in the street rationed himself and his family, but the rich folk went on eating and drinking much as they had always done. The theatres were crowded and so were the restaurants, chiefly with khaki. Yet the gaiety of the night life was obviously forced. Faces looked strained. One could see that the public, realizing at last that the danger of conquest had become grave, nevertheless tried to drive the idea out of their minds. Young men not in khaki had grown far fewer. Everywhere women carried on men's jobs—they drove cars, served as waitresses in men's West End clubs where formerly such an innovation would not have been tolerated, were 'bus conductors, railway guards, post-women, farm-hands, engine cleaners, even street scavengers. And very efficiently they seemed to carry out those duties.

It was wrong of me not to have seen my father, but how could I suspect what was so soon to happen —that I was to get another blow, a double blow this time?

I was back again in France. General Foch had been appointed Chief of Staff of the French Army. I had been there barely three weeks when news came to me that my brother Tom's kite balloon had been brought down in flames and that Tom was dead. Four days later came a telegram from my mother. My father had had a stroke and his condition was critical.

I wanted to rush home at once. At any cost I must see my father once more.

Rupert, now virtually my C.O., was adamant.

"Impossible," he said. Then, after closing the door, he took me in his arms and kissed me.

"You know, darling," he murmured, "I would do anything you ask—if I could. Anything in the world. But we are at war and you are serving just as much as any fighting man is serving. I want you badly at the moment—you have helped me so much and are going to help me much more. Besides, your father would most likely be dead before you got home. You must do as I tell you—or rather as I ask you. . . ."

He was right. Next day I had a wire saying that my father had died, and giving the date of the funeral.

I shall never forget the letter my mother wrote to me after the funeral. I cannot print it. She upbraided me for my "callousness" in not coming home for the funeral, called me ungrateful, hard-hearted—and something much worse. But my boiling indignation soon subsided, for suddenly an access of terrible grief at the loss of both my father and my brother Tom and the recollection that Henry, my favourite brother, was still missing, overwhelmed me. I thought that I literally should have died of misery.

And perhaps I should have but for Rupert. His consideration and kindness and sympathy were as great as any woman's could have been—greater. Though he had so much to occupy his thoughts, and his duties were so important, he found time to spend with me during those dreadful days. And wisely, he kept me busy, to keep my mind from brooding.

For I was anxious, too, about my naval brother, from whom I had not heard for several months.

"I want you to return to ambulance work for a little while," Rupert said to me one morning. "They are short of drivers, and I can spare you at the moment, though I never know how soon I may want you again. I am leaving here at once—I mustn't tell you where for, or what I am going to do."

I spent that night with him, and reported next day where he had told me to. He had told me he thought that, where I was going, I should find Gwen, and I did.

That, at any rate, afforded me comfort. We had so much to talk about and she had so much to tell me. I had not seen her for some months, and she looked much more grown up. She no longer ever felt "afraid," she said, and for that, she declared, she had me to thank. And she told me about the youth with whom, those months ago, I had brought her into touch.

"He is going to marry me," she said, "as soon as the war is over."

I remember that I smiled.

"Don't be silly, Gwen," I said. "They all say that. Why, he has hardly left his mother's apron strings. He'll change his mind a dozen times before he really marries."

That annoyed her. She told me that I had grown cynical, which was true. But I had seen so much of men and come to know their ways so well that it was not surprising. And many things had embittered me. The boy I had introduced to her

was quite an attractive youth, and I sincerely hoped that he would marry her, but still I had my doubts. He might prove to be the exception. One never knew.

The country we were in now was all new to me, but it was just as ugly and monotonous as the rest of the line, or as much of the line as I had seen. One day while we were resting we noticed a fatigue party digging in a shell-hole that was half full of water. Curiosity made us walk across to see what was happening. Protruding from a side of the hole was a long boot—and there was something in the boot. The men were digging up a body, and we watched, fascinated, as unpleasant spectacles will sometimes fascinate. The man had evidently been buried by the shell that had burst and made the hole, and before long they got him out.

An officer—a captain. But the body was not decomposed. It was dried up almost like a mummy's, and shrunken. The officer (or N.C.O., I forget which) in charge of the fatigue party removed the identity disc and emptied all the pockets. There was a gold cigarette-case with a *fleur-de-lis* in diamonds at one corner, a knife, a corkscrew, a clinical thermometer, several letters and some money. These the officer tied up in his pocket-handkerchief. The body was left there. I suppose it was buried later, and that the contents of his pockets were sent to his home.

One did not meet many cuddle-pups, as we used to call them, because I think that most of them wangled to remain at home, or at a Base, but we came across a few.

It was Gwen who introduced a delightful specimen to me. A subaltern in the A.S.C., aged about twenty-six. He was about the most precious thing I met during the war. In the horse transport, commonly called H.T., he had only recently come out. He showed me with pride his various properties. Among them was a solid leather suit-case, concave underneath, with a contraption of leather straps to buckle it to the cantle of the saddle. Then he opened it.

It was lined in pale blue silk and fitted with every article necessary for the toilet—silver-backed hair-brushes and combs, little crystal jars with silver screw tops, silver-topped bottles which looked suspiciously like scent bottles, razors and shaving-brushes and tubes of shaving paste and toothpaste, a large folding mirror with a small one alongside it—the latter a magnifier—and many other things.

"So handy, isn't it?" he said, ogling me. "Look in the glass, dear, and you'll see a lovely lady. One just straps it on behind one's saddle, and then no matter where one finds oneself one has everything at hand. Look—this is to boil one's shaving water," and he pulled out a little silver vessel.

Before I had known him a quarter of an hour he had told me that his mother was an honourable, who his father was, where he had been at school, the College at Oxford where he had completed his education, that he had formerly been in the Guards, and other information about himself and his past life. I heard afterwards that his beautiful suit-case was discovered by his Company Commander and confiscated. Still,

I dare say he would have fought well enough had the occasion arisen or had he found himself in a tight place. Some of those cuddle-pups who seemed so effeminate and futile fought like tigers, I was told more than once.

CHAPTER XV

Most men who fought in the war will tell you that though they gradually grew accustomed to danger from shells, rifle and machine-gun fire, and so on, they never got accustomed to poison gas, that gas always went on putting the wind up them.

That was what I found. I had been wounded twice by shrapnel, not seriously, yet after a while the explosions and the awful noise during an engagement no longer made my mouth go dry, or made me want to be sick, or terrified me. There is truth in that French saying, *C'est le premier pas qui coûte* —that I had found, too, in relation to my association with Rupert. In regard to danger, one felt hideously frightened, " nervy," the first, second and perhaps the third time one found oneself within killing distance of shrapnel. After that the strain lessened, and went on lessening. But gas . . .

There was something so insidious and inhuman about gas. It caused such frightful and unnecessary agony, all except the tear gas, which though painful in the extreme, did not torture. I thank God that I was never gassed, though once I got a breath of it. But I had seen victims of gas often enough to stand ever in dread of it. And the gas gangrene which so often followed. I could hardly bear to nurse men who had been badly gassed.

Life in our area had been comparatively quiet for some weeks; I say comparatively with reason, for it was rarely really quiet, so far as I can remember. There had been wounded to be conveyed to the hospital, sometimes to private billets; supplies to be taken here or there; officers to be driven from place to place; but that was all. Except for a small amount of joy riding in a feeble attempt to forget the war.

I detested some of those joy rides, because there were officers who wanted to be driven about merely because they had a pretty girl to drive them. And on those occasions being driven by a pretty girl meant trying to flirt with her—and sometimes worse. I don't know if it was the actual fighting which inflamed these men's passion, or the fact that many had for so long been kept away from women, and that even when not deprived of women's society the best they could get was the company of professional prostitutes. It was extremely tiresome at times, yet one had to put up with it. Had one not done so the officers—or some of them—would, I know, have retaliated by reporting that one was inefficient. During the war I met men who were fully as spiteful as a spiteful woman.

It was in the summer of that year that I saw American troops for the first time. They were, I think, some of the earlier contingents, and their fine physique impressed me—I was told they came from Alabama. Tall, naturally straight without the aid of drill, the drilling I saw them do rather amused me. No order was given, apparently. One word was shouted, and at once the men hurried into formation, without caring (it seemed to me) how

they got there. Their adjutant told me they had been stationed in Winchester for some time on their arrival in England from America. He had been greatly attracted by Winchester, I gathered, and was under the impression that all our English provincial towns were built on that pattern. I regretted having to disillusion him.

They were the most unsophisticated body of men I have ever met, and anxious to learn everything one could tell them about the conduct of the war, army regulations, the duties of the women, the ranks and duties of the British officers they met, what the various badges meant, also all that one could tell them about England. The adjutant I have spoken of told me that the first thing he meant to see in London—if he ever got there—was "your Albert Memorial." He said that since he was a small boy he had longed to see the Albert Memorial! After that he wanted to see "your Westminster Bridge, where Wordsworth wrote his sonnets"! Did Wordsworth write sonnets on Westminster Bridge? I fear that my education was sadly neglected, for I was never told that. But of course I didn't tell him so.

He showed me a French franc and an English shilling.

"Say," he said, "what's the difference here? They're sure alike."

I explained. He looked hard at the head on each coin.

"But it's sure the same guy on both," he said, puzzled.

We did not treat the Americans with courtesy;

but perhaps in other areas they did. An English officers' mess and an American officers' mess were but a few hundred yards apart, yet those English officers showed the Americans no hospitality whatever, at least during the weeks I was there. That betrayed great want of tact. I know that no Scottish unit would have cold-shouldered the Americans. Perhaps friendliness was established when they got up near the front. We were far behind the lines at the time I refer to.

"What ho, Yanks! Joined up a bit late, 'aven't yer?"

That was the sort of taunt one heard from our Tommies, and the Americans didn't like it, naturally. The Australians hated the Americans. The New Zealanders fraternized with the Americans. One day a partly intoxicated Australian hooligan held something out to an American.

"Hold this a moment, mate," he said.

The American took hold of it and it exploded, blowing off three of his fingers. The Australian laughed. But you find that species of swine in every nation, I suppose.

Several hills had been captured, and our ambulances were busy again. More slaughter, more shambles, more hateful waste of life. But we drivers had grown callous—perhaps I should say hardened. We could look on death and horrible wounds now without a quiver. But about the future we were anxious. Depressing rumours were everywhere. The newspapers gave no news. The enemy hordes were apparently inexhaustible. According to statistics almost the whole of the German Army had been

destroyed some months ago, yet they rolled up in their thousands still, company after company, battery after battery. Their ammunition, too, held out—that also had all been expended, according to statistics. The recent arrival of the Americans, however, cheered us to some extent. They had been in action and had done well. Afterwards at the Bases one heard the Americans jeered at. They boasted of having won the war, it was said. Some of them may have, but I never heard one of them say anything of the sort. And apart from all pretence—did they *not* win the war? I mean, if America had not joined us in the nick of time, when our men of fifty (I think it was fifty, and married men at that) were being conscripted, should we have won the war?

My opinion is that we should not, and some of our officers who knew what they were talking about thought so too. Even Foch declared, it was said, that Germany would have conquered had America remained neutral.

After an absence of over two months, Rupert turned up unexpectedly. He looked terribly ill and had lost two fingers of his left hand. He would not tell me what had happened.

For a fortnight or more we saw a lot of each other. He was depressed, pessimistic. I had never before seen him pessimistic, and it worried me. But his tremendous affection helped to ease the tension.

"I don't believe this bloody war is ever going to end," he exclaimed one night. "The enemy are still fearfully strong. I've just been in Germany, and I know. Killing them is like killing flies; for every

two you kill, three more come along. Darling Connie "—he had me in his arms—" you mustn't worry if I don't come through—do you hear what I say? We've had a good time together, and I'd willingly go through the war again if I had never met you and I knew that the war would bring us together. You are the loveliest . . . darlingest . . ."

But that was more than I could bear. I flung my arms about him again and held him tight, and cried and cried. I couldn't help it. The thought that he might not " come through " seemed to render me insane. I implored him never to say a thing like that again.

So he went on to talk about what we would do together when the war was over. First of all we would travel and travel—he loved travelling as much as I did. We could not, of course, live in England after peace had been declared, as we were living now. Nosey Parkers would nose out the truth, and people would talk, and I should be cut. Not that that would distress me, as I told him. But the possibility of a scandal, and my name being bandied about, seemed to upset him. If only his wife would die . . . he had never loved her, he had confided that to me before . . . he was a rich man and had a title, and her relatives had been instrumental in bringing about the marriage, to all intents against his will. And less than two years afterwards it had become necessary to have her looked after.

My God, how we loved each other! Surely no man and woman can ever have loved each other more. We had been born to love each other, there

could be no doubt about that. No woman had ever before appealed to him, he had told me often, and certainly no other man had ever appealed to me—or has since—or ever will. It was love combined with passion. My very soul became part of his, and his part of mine.

We had just finished dressing, one morning, when a dispatch-rider arrived in great haste. There was, as usual, the long buff envelope—"On His Majesty's Service" marked "Urgent and Confidential." He tore it open, and the envelope enclosed in it. When he had read the contents he initialed the envelope and gave it back to the dispatch-rider.

Then he turned to me. He looked very grave.

"Connie, you must be brave—I mean extra brave," he said in a queer voice.

I could feel my heart thumping as he gazed into my eyes. I guessed what he was going to say. He was ordered on some mission from which he thought he might not return. But I had guessed wrongly.

"Darling," he said after a pause, holding my arms in a tight grip, "I want you to help me once more. This is going to be the riskiest thing I have yet asked you to do. I want you, because I know nobody else whom I could trust as I can trust you. At the same time if you would rather not . . ."

Oh, the relief of that moment! He was not going to his death. All he wanted was that I should again help him. And all I longed for always was to be able to help him in any way and every way.

We talked it over at breakfast, and after breakfast went to our room in order to arrange the details. Again the idea was his, and again he was going to act on his own initiative and responsibility, and quite secretly.

I had been in the air only once. A joy flight at a Base, when a rather wild young pilot had insisted on taking me up. I did not enjoy that experience. One was not in an enclosed " bus " as one is to-day, and the sensation made me feel dizzy and seasick. And by way of a joke the pilot came down to earth in a vertical spiral—I think he called it the " falling leaf " descent. He thought it fun. I did not. It needed a strong whisky-and-soda to make me feel normal again—the only time, I think, I have really appreciated whisky-and-soda.

Little did I dream that one day I should fly over the enemy's lines and into their country.

And then it happened.

I felt utterly reckless. After all, what did it matter if one were killed—now? My beloved father and two of my brothers were dead; possibly my sailor brother too. There was no other person I cared about in the world but Rupert. And he was with me.

It was a dark night. Far beneath us lights and fires twinkled. One could see guns flashing many miles away. Below us Véry lights shot up—they seemed to rise a few inches only. Mere specks of light spreading out.

We knew we were not seen, or enemy 'planes would have been after us and those nasty things they called " archies " have been bursting somewhere

near us. The sensation of sneaking, as it were, into the enemy's country under cover of night was thrilling. Yet I felt comparatively calm.

The 'plane dipped its nose. We were descending, gliding towards the earth. I was dressed once more to resemble an old woman, a German *frau* this time. A wonderful make-up. Rupert had supervised its every detail, and I should not have known myself had I looked into a mirror.

The engine changed its tune. It was slowing down. We were running very fast along a stretch of level ground. The propeller stopped revolving and we came to a standstill.

To the left I could discern a black outline in the darkness. Trees. A wood or a forest. Rupert was helping me to get out. Then the engine roared once more, the 'plane ran away and vanished, and almost at once we heard it soaring overhead.

We were alone. A high wind was blowing, had been blowing since we started—no doubt the reason we had not been attacked, as the 'plane could not be heard. Rupert, disguised as an old German with a beard, took me by the hand, led me along. Now we were among the trees—apparently a forest. Rupert seemed able to see in the dark. Or how could he have found his way through that blackness in the way he did?

"I was here some weeks ago," he said to me. "We have not much farther to go."

It was a warm night. We slept close together in the dilapidated hut deep down in that forest, on a bed of leaves. When at last day dawned and I looked out I could see nothing but trees. Rupert

was still asleep. On one side of the hut lay a grass-grown track which disappeared amongst the trees.

I got up and prepared breakfast, using rations we had brought with us. Perfect stillness reigned. What astonished me was that not a bird could be seen or heard. I had noticed that in the French forests too. Had the war frightened them away?

Until nearly midday we sat talking—an ideal spot for love-making. Rupert brought out his maps again, and some plans which he had drawn, and together we studied them carefully.

"You must photograph them on your brain," he said. "Remember, a single false move may mean that we get shot at dawn. Don't you feel afraid, now that we are here, right in the enemy's country?"

Somehow I did not, I don't know why, and I told him so. Perhaps it was difficult to imagine that in this silent solitude danger could be near.

He seemed surprised.

"You certainly have pluck," he said. "A fellow with me last time felt so scared he could hardly speak. I sent him back again and carried on alone."

Then, for a while, we forgot about the war; at least I know I did. And I think I felt happier than ever in my life before. And I thought of Gwen, and wondered if many, or any of our women in France were engaged in work of the sort I was doing then. I had heard it said that Sir Robert Baden Powell—as he was then—was doing "intelligence work" in the heart of the enemy's country. I asked Rupert if it were true.

He laughed, but would not answer. To this day we have not been told what that wonderful old man did during those four eventful years, when nobody ever heard of him. It was the sort of adventure he would, I know, have loved. Perhaps after his death the truth will be revealed.

CHAPTER XVI

TOWARDS midday we left the hut. There was no need to lock the door. Nobody would come there, Rupert said. He doubted if anybody remembered that a hut was there. The owner had been an old woman, and she was dead.

"Are many of our people doing this sort of thing?" I asked as we started along the half-hidden, grass-grown track which disappeared amongst the trees.

But he would not say.

We had walked in single file for half an hour or more, Rupert hobbling along with the help (apparently) of a stout stick, and looking, from behind, about a hundred years old, when the blue sky became visible beyond the trees. Five minutes more, and we emerged from the forest into open country and began to make our way towards a long white road where the dust was being blown up in clouds. There had been no wind in the forest.

Slowly we walked, or rather crawled, side by side. Rupert had cut a stick for me in the forest, and the rate of progress of the worn-out old couple, as we appeared to be, could not have exceeded two miles an hour. To right and left, in front and behind, no human being was visible. About three miles ahead in the direction in which we were going a few small houses could just be seen. Nowhere else was there any habitation.

We talked in German now, the German of the peasants, and of old peasants at that. My father had been an excellent linguist. He spoke no less than seven languages fluently and had himself taught me French, Italian and German. Rupert's impersonation of the old German would have deceived German detectives. I felt that everything depended on *my* not failing.

Beyond the houses was a hamlet, perhaps thirty houses in all. At the entrance to one of them a middle-aged woman was gnawing a bit of black bread. She looked half starved. So did most of the people we saw.

"For the sake of Christ give me something to eat," Rupert said, going close up to her and peering at her through his dark spectacles. "I have had nothing to eat since the day before yesterday, and my poor wife ate her last crust yesterday morning. We have walked all the way from . . ." he gave the name of some village.

"What, you again?" the woman exclaimed in a hard voice. She looked me up and down. "Old things like you ought to be dead. Of what use are old people? All you do is eat food that our brave soldiers need so badly. Where are you going?"

Rupert, wheezing badly, said that he was going to the town, which was eight miles farther on. He was returning to the institution (a sort of workhouse) that he had come out of the last time he saw her. She had given him food then, he reminded her. Now he was taking his old wife back with him, "but we shall never get there without something to eat. We shall both die by the roadside."

" And a good thing too," the woman answered in the same hard voice. The dead were the happiest now. She wished that she were dead. Those —— English starving them all to death with their God-cursed blockade . . . and then she used some blasphemous German adjectives.

" Wait," she said suddenly.

She disappeared into her ugly cottage. It had several broken windows, and a board hanging by a hinge. A minute later she returned with a hunk of black bread and a bit of hard sausage.

" Here," she said, pushing it into Rupert's outstretched hand. " And to hell with you and all like you ! "

We were profuse in our expressions of gratitude. Then we turned to go, and she cursed us again.

We gnawed the bread and the hard sausage as we hobbled with our sticks through the village—this, Rupert told me afterwards, was to disarm suspicion. Nobody looked at us or paid the slightest attention. Two cars with officers rushed past. A civilian car came along and the driver cursed us for getting in his way, and also told us we ought both to be dead.

Beyond the village was a cross-roads. We turned to the right.

There was much traffic on this road. Rupert said it was the main road between two towns where troops were stationed. Nobody offered us a lift.

It was late evening when we reached the town. Everywhere there was great activity. One building was brilliantly lit. Some place of amusement. Most of the other houses were almost in darkness. Soldiers were everywhere.

Rupert had been there before, and knew his way about. We made our way through the crowd into a rather disreputable drinking-shop where almost as many women as soldiers were talking noisily, chiefly about the war and what was happening and what was going to happen, though there were notices displayed, as in France, warning everybody to be cautious and not to talk indiscreetly. Many of the men and women were what our men used to call "well oiled."

At the counter Rupert ordered some beer, and fumbled in his shabby clothes for some money. For perhaps ten minutes we stood there, exchanging an occasional remark. And all the while we listened intently.

From that drinking-shop we passed on to another, then to another, then to a fourth. They resembled one another, and everywhere the crowd of soldiers and women talked incessantly. They talked, many of them, without reserve, particularly those among them who had drunk too much. I mingled with the women as much as I could, and talked to some of them—fortunately I am able to speak German very fluently, and some of its dialects. Rupert stayed amongst the men. Our task was to listen to all that was being said, and to remember anything which might prove to be of use.

Finally, late at night, we trudged (apparently wearily) out of the town, and slept under a hedge where we could not be seen—though it was strictly *verboten* to sleep in the fields.

Thus day after day we went from town to town, and entered drinking-shops where soldiers fore-

gathered with their women. Within a week we had each picked up many items of useful information—we often moved about separately but always on the alert, always listening intently. Nobody questioned us. Nobody suspected. How could they have suspected an old couple who looked so poor and so harmless?

It had been Rupert's idea that we should impersonate a poor old married couple. He had worked alone on the previous occasion, and gleaned a lot of information concerning the enemy's movements—or some of their movements—the whereabouts of this and that unit, their approximate strength, supplies of ammunition, and so forth.

"It is the man in the gutter who knows which horse will win a race—not the owners or the trainers," he used to say. "And it is the man in the gutter who picks up the most accurate bits of news about what is happening at the front."

When spying in the guise of an old, middle-class German, or dressed in German officer's uniform, as he had done once, he had not had great success. Men and women of the middle class remembered the posted notices and were for the most part reticent. If they happened to know something of what was going on they kept it to themselves, and they rarely spoke indiscreetly. When masquerading as an enemy officer he quickly realized that he would soon be discovered—indeed, he had been discovered finally, and shot at, and that was how he came to lose two fingers. Yet he had managed to hide himself and steal a suit of civilian clothes and two nights later reach the spot where the 'plane would, he knew,

pick him up if the night were dark and windy. All this he confided to me while we were together in the enemy's territory.

The 'plane was to pick us up at the spot where it had dropped us, on the first dark and windy night after our seventh night across the lines. During those seven days we had collected much useful information, slept four nights under the stars, two nights in a poor lodging-house, and one night in the forest hut. We had covered a considerable distance, for several times we had been given lifts in commercial cars—not once in an army transport. We were back near the forest again, but the moon shone and the wind refused to blow and so we slept once more in the hut, and the night after that, and the night after. On the eleventh night clouds rolled up and rain threatened, and though there was little wind the 'plane circled overhead shortly after midnight—the "tune" of the British engine could readily be distinguished from that of German 'planes.

Rapidly it glided down, landing almost exactly where it had dropped us, and the flash of an electric torch was our signal. Hardly were we in the air when several enemy 'planes started in pursuit.

Then began our flight for life. The enemy 'planes were gaining on us, trying hard to get above us. Soon they opened fire, but our pilot dived and rose and twisted and turned—performed every sort of evolution. Beams of light shot up from the earth, guns below us flashed, shells exploded near us. . . .

Then at last we knew we were back behind our lines.

A thrilling experience. The most thrilling I had, yet less terrifying than that night in the burning mill. A thrilling experience without casualties.

. . . . . .

Granted some days' leave, I spent them in ——. I must not name that ruined town, for a reason to be given presently. I had stayed there with my father and my brother Henry during the summer of 1912, and was curious to see what it looked like now. I detested the Bases with their petty squabbles and futile gossip, and the silly friction there seemed always to be between units and between companies and between the regulars and the territorials and the temporary officers. It all seemed so suburban, if I may put it so—I don't wish to offend anybody's susceptibilities. But when I got there the spectacle of that formerly beautiful old city now lying in ruins so upset me that I almost cried. I looked for the hotel where the three of us had spent such happy days. Not a wall of it remained.

Christmas was approaching again, yet the end of the war was still not in sight. Rupert had disappeared some weeks before. He had told me that most likely I should not hear from him, as his movements would be uncertain. I missed him dreadfully —no wife could have longed to see her husband as I longed to see him again. Every night I longed for him, longed to feel his strong arms around me, his passionate kisses, listen to his hot words of endearment. And Gwen had vanished too and left me in silence. Had she tired of the war and gone home to her people? Dear little Gwen. What a plucky

girl she was. Her presence had always cheered me, even during her bad attacks of " nerves."

A thing which upset me a good deal was the drastic treatment meeted out to the American soldiers by some of their N.C.O.'s. If a British soldier failed to salute an officer he would be " ticked off " by the officer; if he failed twice, he would perhaps be given fatigue duty or some other simple punishment. But an American soldier failing to salute would as likely as not get a crack on the head from an N.C.O.'s wooden staff (it resembled a policeman's) which knocked him flat without stunning him. In one of our canteens the women reared up the first time they saw this happen, and threatened to mutiny if it again occurred in their canteen. The women in a Y.M.C.A. hut also entered a protest when an American soldier was knocked down in that way for some trifling offence.

The French had a queer punishment too; I suppose it was a form of field punishment. On two or three occasions I drove past *poilus* doing fatigue duty in the fields and holding in their mouths a bar some inches long—it may have been a bit of wood —from which depended a swinging weight. They grinned when we smiled at them, and tried to kiss their hands at us. With that contraption in their mouths they could not speak.

Whenever I wanted a Frenchman to do me a favour—civilian, policeman, or soldier of no matter what rank—I always began by offering him a cigarette. Generally the effect was magical; the offer of that cigarette seemed instantly to establish a sort of *entente cordiale*, even when the individual had at

first seemed disposed to be surly. Of course for a pretty woman most Frenchmen would do anything, but there were some—not many—who were pretty-woman proof. Quite a lot of our own officers, on the other hand, were pretty-woman proof, and I rather admired them for it—most men become such weak creatures when they look into a pair of bright eyes. Who was the author who wrote: "*L'amour est la faiblesse des grands hommes*"? He might have added: "*Et des petits hommes aussi.*"

I said earlier in this book that I am not enamoured of my own sex—as a body. But during the war the majority of those with whom I had to associate appeared to considerable advantage, if I may use a hackneyed phrase. They were not hypocritical, they were not spiteful, they were not jealous of one another; nor did they back-bite or display intolerance. There were exceptions, however. Three I met during the days I spent in the town I have referred to.

They came from my part of the English Midlands, and at home we had been acquaintances—no more. That, of course, was before the war. They hunted and danced and did the other things that I did and that everybody does who lives in the country and has no particular aim in life beyond trying to enjoy it. They had smiled delightfully when, those years ago, I had told them that I meant to become a hospital nurse and try to get out to France.

"But how *splendid* of you, Connie," one of them had exclaimed, opening her eyes wide.

"And how *plucky*!" the other had chimed in. "But you always were like that, weren't you? Always wanting to get about and do things and make

yourself useful. I *do* hope you'll enjoy it, dear. I only wish *I* could do something. . . ."

"And I, too," added the other (the third was not with them).

"But why can't you?" I said.

Then they looked at each other and gave a little giggle.

"Well, Connie, one can't exactly explain, can one?" the first speaker replied. "You see—well, *your* father is a parson. Parsons' daughters are expected to help and do the best they can for their fellow-creatures, aren't they? And I am sure you'll find it more interesting and I dare say more exciting than parish work. And you'll meet lots of nice men, I expect."

It was not so much what she said as the tone she said it in that stirred up something inside me. It was the only half-veiled attitude of patronage in the way they both spoke and looked that so annoyed me —"You see—*your* father is a parson," "*only* a parson" was the taunt implied. One of them was the daughter of a colonel in the Indian Army (retired); the other the only child of a rich bootmaker (also retired), and they had always tried to make me feel that therefore my social standing was inferior to theirs, that I was not "County" in the sense that they were "County." "And you'll meet lots of nice men, I expect." That remark, meant to sting, I could afford to disregard. I knew so well why it had been said, and how envious the two were of my good looks. Yet I would not have exchanged my looks for the bootmaker's daughter's prospective fortune, or my father for the retired colonel.

CHAPTER XVII

And now I met the two again—I had not seen them since that day—and their friend. All three were in charge of a canteen in ——.

When I went up to the counter they pretended at first not to see me, though I had recognized them at once.

"Why, Dawn," I exclaimed, "what a surprise! I had no idea that you, or any of you, were out here," which was true. "When did you join the Waacs?"

"I wish you wouldn't call us 'Waacs,'" she answered coldly, pushing a cup of tea across the counter to one of the men. "It's so common to talk like that. How are you, B——?" using my surname.

Then the other two joined her.

The manner of all three was distant, not to say cold. I guessed the reason. They had heard some scandal about me. As my mother knew of my attachment for Rupert, that was not surprising.

"We were sorry to hear of your father's death," one of them said presently. "His Will was published in the papers. I suppose you know that."

Of course I knew. And of course I knew why she spoke about it. My father had made a small bequest to Nurse T, to whom he had been so kind when her baby was expected. I might have guessed—though until then it had not occurred to me—that these girls and most of the people I had known in the Midlands,

and naturally my mother, would put the worst construction on my dear father's disinterested little act of kindness.

The war had not broadened these girls' outlook. That was obvious. Yet not very surprising, for I gathered that during the months they had been in France they had not been near the danger zone—this town was safe from shelling now. There was, of course, no reason for them to go near it, but again I was forcibly struck by the difference that existed between the women—and the men too—who had seen something of the actual war, and those who had all the time remained in safety. It was rather remarkable.

"Dawn heard a lot about you when she was home on leave," one of them said a little later. "It was rumoured that you were married. Then the rumour was contradicted—by your mother. Nothing in it, I suppose?" glancing down at my hand.

"Nothing at all," I said. "If you believe the rumours we get out here about the war, as our friends at home used to believe the local gossip, you will soon feel convinced that we've no chance of winning the war."

None of them smiled.

"Still," Dawn remarked, half-shutting her eyes in the way she did when saying anything nasty, "there's seldom smoke without fire."

"Oh, there's plenty of fire," I rapped out at her. "That you know quite well. You needn't pretend that you haven't been told—told of my 'affair' with Rupert ——, as I expect you call it. Scandal of that nature couldn't escape being broadcast throughout the country-side in a county like ours."

More men were demanding tea, so the sirens floated away, glad of the excuse to end our talk. I saw them only once again while there, and they looked in the opposite direction.

Twelve years have passed since then. As I could not bear to return to my old home after the war, I had not seen them during those twelve years, until last December, when I caught a glimpse of one of them at a big in-aid-of entertainment in London. I noticed that she wore a wedding-ring, so naturally I did not obtrude. I knew that she would now, more than ever, dislike to be spoken to by a "fallen woman."

Just before Christmas I found myself in Rouen again. It was like returning to civilization. The town was crawling with English, French, American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and native troops. The hotels and restaurants were crowded every night, and the entire War Office staff seemed to have settled down in the Hôtel de la Poste—I think that was the name of it. But the hundreds of loose women who had infested the streets and the restaurants and the places of amusement the last time I had been there were gone. They were accused of spreading disease, I was told, and hounded out of the town.

Depôts which had consisted of a few huts had grown into huge camps. The hospital tents up on the hill had multiplied enormously. Instead of one ship landing troops once or twice a week, troopships now arrived sometimes twice a day, in addition to the ships loaded with supplies and with ammunition. The place had been transformed from a rather sleepy port into a Base humming with activity.

Again I got leave to stay at an hotel—the Hôtel d'Angleterre, facing the river. Officers crowded into it and crowded out. Liquor of many sorts flowed freely. Introductions were waived, perhaps because Christmas was so near, and everybody had begun to hope that at last the war must be nearing its end. Only one or two other women war-workers were staying there, and some nurses who were going home.

The officers bothered me a good deal, but fortunately no bounders were among them.

"We are getting up several theatrical performances," a young major said to me one afternoon. "Could we induce you to take part? We need a beauteous maiden to play the leading rôle in . . ." he laughed and named the play. "By the way, are you by chance related to . . . ?" he named my brother Lionel. I told him I was, then quickly changed the subject.

The performance was to take place in a week's time, some days after Christmas, of course in aid of a war charity. The major—I will call him Jones, Major Jones—told me that before the war he had been a professional producer. For Lionel he appeared to have a strong admiration, which annoyed me. He had been on tour with him, he said. He presumed he was now fighting.

Anxious not to disgrace my family, I replied that my brother had "joined up long ago."

"Naturally he would," said Major Jones. "And come through all right so far, I hope?"

I told him that up to the present Lionel had not been wounded. I did not add that so far as I knew my gallant brother was still safe in England and

drawing his adjutant's pay. I did not suspect that he was then in Ireland and shortly to experience the great adventure of his life.

What a ghastly entertainment that was; ghastly, that is to say, for the unfortunate audience! A musical comedy they called it, but it was neither musical nor comical. We enjoyed it, of course. Amateur players generally do enjoy their own performances. Major Jones did his best to compel his disgruntled and half-rebellious troup to imitate professional actors and actresses, but most of them were quite sure that they knew more about acting and production than he did. During rehearsals the leading characters quarrelled openly, and when he politely expostulated they stopped quarrelling and turned on him. Most of the women were V.A.D.'s, the rest motor-drivers and canteen girls. I am afraid they didn't like me much. They looked upon me as an outsider who had, as I overheard one of them say, "butted in and got all the fat for herself."

"I wish your brother were playing opposite you instead of that conceited pup," Major Jones said to me on the night of the dress rehearsal. "We might then have put up a decent show."

He seemed surprised when I did not reply.

Certainly the "young pup" was a trial. He belonged to some provincial company of amateurs and knew exactly how everything ought to be done, and tried once or twice to put our professional producer in his place.

"Look here, Major, when I produced 'The Best Girl of all' in the town hall at Slowcombe-in-the-

Marsh, I made the girls come forward so . . . and turn so . . . and then retire so. . . ."

"And you shall make them come forward so, and turn so, and then retire so, when you go back to Slowcombe-in-the-Marsh," was the Major's calm reply. "Meanwhile be good enough to shut up, and the company will do what I tell them."

Still, these rehearsals and the performance and the other Christmas-time amusements helped to divert our thoughts from the war, of which everybody was sick to death by that time. Nobody, indeed, seemed to take any further interest in it beyond wondering how soon it would all end. The war had grown stale. It had long ago lost its excitement. The adventure of taking part in it was a thing of the past. We all longed and longed for it to be over so that we might get home once more and live in some sort of comfort. One felt that these amusements were forced and artificial, that underneath them all was that unexpressed yearning for peace to be declared. I don't think that by the end of that year many of the men would have cared who won the war provided the fighting stopped.

On New Year's Eve came a letter from my sailor brother. What a joy that was! For over five months I had not heard from him. He wrote in good spirits, but the letter bore no address and no postmark. He spoke of our father's death and of Henry and Tom's death, yet his letter was comforting. I wondered if he had really felt in good spirits when he wrote.

Rupert was still silent, and the length of his silence began to frighten me. During that Christmas in

Rouen I received three proposals of marriage, and one of the proposers was so insistent and persevering that I began to want to get away. At all sorts of hours he would turn up at the Angleterre, and almost every time he produced a present of some sort. It was most embarrassing. Finally, hoping to put an end to his repeated proposals, I told him that I was virtually engaged.

"What do you mean by 'virtually' engaged?" he exclaimed. "I don't believe that you are telling me the truth. And I shall not believe you unless you tell me who the man is."

Therefore I told him.

At once his expression changed.

"Good for you!" he burst out. "Rupert —— is my first cousin, my uncle's son. And he's got a wife already! Oh, don't tell me," he went on quickly. "I know all about old Rupert. A damn fine fellow, good soldier and all that, but he's got a woman in tow—everybody knows about it. You can't marry Rupert, dear, unless he commits bigamy."

"I am the woman he has in tow," I said gently. "But I didn't know that 'everybody knew about it.'"

He stared at me.

"*You!* But that's impossible. You must be lying!"

"I am not lying. Look."

I produced from inside my tunic a little photograph that Rupert had given me.

"My God!"

Poor boy, he was terribly upset. I told him that

he must take back all the presents he had given me, but that he flatly refused to do. He was a fine, generous lad. Quite a lot of men would, under the circumstances, have drawn themselves up, possibly have insulted me. Oh, yes, they would. One or two had already insulted me on finding out about me.

"I am sorry," he said at last. "Of course, dear, I won't bother you any more. But I wish you had told me before, because you have no idea how dreadfully in love with you I am—dreadfully. I can well understand Rupert's having fallen for you, and you for him. I expect that even you don't know what a splendid chap he is. I could tell you things about him—things that he would never dream of telling you himself."

"Oh, I wish you would," I remember saying, hardly knowing what I said.

And so he told me. I had always suspected Rupert of being a hero of some sort. And my suspicion had been correct.

I let the boy kiss me before we parted, and I kissed him in return. He deserved it for his gallantry. I don't believe that many men would have proved so selfless.

I never saw him again. Months later I read that he had been killed in action. The news upset me more than I should have thought possible, seeing how little the thought and sight of death now distressed me or any of us.

Until that joy visit to Rouen—it really was a joy visit, for one's duties were negligible by comparison with the work one had grown accustomed to up the

line—I had not realized what an extremely pleasant time some of the officers enjoyed who remained always at a Base. And how they must have chuckled—if they had a sense of humour—on getting letters from their relatives and friends at home expressing anxiety for their safety!

Among the most amusing of these gentlemen was a quaint character I became acquainted with whom you would have imagined to be Commander-in-Chief at least, by the way he talked. He always carried a box-respirator, a steel helmet, a revolver, a field-glass, a filter, various other gadgets which I forget, and on occasions a sword—though I know that he was never orderly officer. He knew exactly what was happening all along the front—though he had never been nearer the front than Abbeville—how the campaign was being conducted, and that it was not being conducted properly, that is to say not in the way that he would have conducted it. In his comfortable billet between a picture theatre and the best restaurant in the town were hung half a dozen large maps marked with little flags. Before those maps he would stand by the hour—if he could get a listener—pointing out "errors of judgment" and "unpardonable mistakes" that men like Haig and Foch had made. He would show you roads where they had turned left instead of keeping straight on (he indicated one road which he said an ammunition column ought to have followed; it had been made impassable by shell-holes weeks before—I happened to know, as I was there), and short cuts that might have been taken instead of the roundabout routes selected (again I could have corrected him, for those

short cuts were mostly marsh-land), and so on and so forth. One afternoon five of us, five women drivers, stood solemnly listening to him, when it occurred to a little idiot amongst us to ask him what his own job was, what he was doing in Rouen.

"Me?" he said. "Oh, I am O.C. goats."

Goats were kept to provide food for the native troops. Still, he knew his job and probably did it well. Anything unknown to him concerning goats, their varieties, their ways and habits and peculiarities and the quantity and quality of their milk, cannot have been worth knowing. Before the war he had been a wine merchant in the City, he said.

I was becoming quite attached to Rouen with its quaint seventeenth-century streets and its cosy restaurants and general air of civilization, when an order came through—I was to go up the line again. I was to report first at Abbeville, stopping one night in Neufchatel on the way. With me would be four other cars, and I was to be in charge.

CHAPTER XVIII

I DID not know why we had been ordered to stop in Neufchatel for a night, for we could easily have made Abbeville by nightfall.

I knew later.

We all had supper together in the little hotel where we had been instructed to garage our cars. The hotel was almost deserted. Only one table in addition to ours was occupied. But then Neufchatel is a small town, little more than a village.

The *patronne*, an infirm body who might have been sixty, or even seventy, was most attentive and obliging. During the meal she waddled over to us to find out if we had all we wanted, then asked if she might sit down near us for a few minutes.

Ah, this war! It was *affreux*. It would never end, she truly believed. Who could have imagined when it began that it would last so long? She was a widow, she told us, and her two sons had been killed. Look—that was her little grandson over there, and she pointed to a small boy standing in the doorway and smiling at us shyly, a pretty little boy, aged about eleven.

"*Viens, mon chéri,*" she called to him.

He came over to us unwillingly, and we talked to him as one talks to small boys, jokingly, patronizingly. And what did the little man think of the war, one of the girls asked him in French.

At that he made a fearful grimace.

"*Sales Allemands!*" he exclaimed quite ferociously, and we all laughed.

His grandmother told us that several times he had been given a joy-ride to Abbeville by some of our Tommies, in their lorries. He loved that. And they would bring him back next day in one of the returning lorries—transport was daily passing through Neufchatel on its way to Rouen from Abbeville. The child's ambition, it seemed, was to be taken as far as Amiens. He was so interested in the war, the old *patronne* declared. Once she had heard him say: "Ah, if I could but kill *one* German myself!"

"Yes, I wish I could—I do wish I could!" the little boy here chipped in, again with that ferocious look which amused us so much. "Mesdemoiselles, could you too not take me in your cars to Abbeville? I *would* love to go again. The soldiers often take me."

His childish enthusiasm touched me. I think it touched us all. I wondered if there would be harm in my giving him that treat. It would not infringe any army regulation that I knew of. And the girls wondered the same. I think the child's appealing eyes stirred the mother instinct in them.

Well, I was in charge. It rested with me. But on second thoughts I decided that it would be injudicious. Some mishap might befall him. . . .

He looked terribly disappointed when I broke it to him that I could not grant him that little favour. Tears came into his eyes, but his grandmother

clasped him to her ample bosom and kissed the crown of his head and called him "*mon petit chou*" and said "*voilà—voilà donc. . . .*"

We went to bed early. Next morning—we were to start early—I was inspecting the cars when a sergeant-major came across the road and saluted.

"Miss ——?" he said.

I replied in the odious manner that our women had long ago adopted:

"Speaking."

He handed me an envelope marked "Urgent. Private."

I initialed it, tore it open, pulled out the slip of paper which it contained, and gave him back the envelope.

He saluted and retired.

On the slip of paper was scribbled in pencil:

"Bring the boy along. R."

That was all.

But I could have jumped with delight. Rupert! How did he know that I was here? Perhaps I should see him soon!

I looked again at the slip.

"Bring the boy along." What boy? Well, there was only one boy—that child at the hotel. But why bring him along?

A train of thought ran quickly through my brain. Rupert wanted the boy for some specific reason, of course. Could that reason be . . . But no. Impossible. Absurd!

When I informed the *patronne* that after all I saw no reason why her "*petit chou*" should not be

given the joy-ride he wanted so much, she was enchanted. She grasped my hand in both her hands and said I was just like all the other English—so kind, always so *aimable*.

He sat beside me, but didn't talk much. I saw now that he was older than I had thought—twelve, or possibly thirteen. When he did talk it was always to say something about the war, ask my opinion about it, when I thought it would end, if we had more troops coming along. . . . The detestation he expressed again and again for the enemy was remarkable, almost as remarkable as his admiration for the British. I asked him about his father and the uncle who had been killed, where they were killed and how long ago, and he told me at once—he had the dates pat.

The first officer I saw when we pulled up in Abbeville was Rupert. He was talking to a sergeant-major, and came forward at once. But he did not smile. His face became stern when he noticed my companion.

"Who is that boy?" he said sharply, looking me straight in the eyes.

I told him. Then, reading something in his eyes, I added:

"I thought there would be no harm in my giving him a joy-ride. He has had joy-rides like this before."

"Has he, indeed! Well, he won't have any more. I never heard of such a thing."

He turned.

"Sergeant-major," he said, "take charge of this boy and see him sent back to Neufchatel at the

earliest possible moment—in the next returning car or lorry."

"He can't go before to-morrow, sir."

"To-morrow will do. As early as possible. You must give him a shake-down to-night.

"Report at my billet at six this evening," he said to me; then told me where his billet was. And with that he walked away.

I got to his billet on the stroke of six. He opened the door himself, led the way into his room, shut the door, listened in silence for a moment, then took two steps forward and swept me into his arms.

He was covering me with kisses, pressing me to him with such force that he almost stifled me.

"Darling! Sweetheart! My God, what a joy having you again! If you knew how I have missed you . . ."

He loved me and fondled me for several minutes before at last letting me go.

"I couldn't write to you or tell you where I was," he said as we sat together on the dirty little French sofa that had black cotton-wool sticking out of one corner. "But I have known your movements—I took pains to be kept posted in them. And I have such lots to tell you. But first of all about that boy. My note must have astonished you. You don't know that that little swine and his pretended grandmother have for weeks been spying for the enemy and telling them quite a lot about movements of troops and so on. We discovered this a few days ago, and at once I got through and immediately it was arranged that you should bring up the convoy and stop at that hotel—the rest you know. That

boy used to listen to the men's talk during his joy-rides; then, when he was here, pretend that he was sick, and so hang about sometimes for several days. The men would give him money to go to the pictures at night, but we believe that he never once went. Instead he used to disappear and meet someone and repeat all that he had heard, and no doubt get well paid. All that has been practically proved."

"But he is French," I said.

"I know he is. And so is the old woman. Any stories she may have told you about the boy's father or any other relatives being killed in the war were all lies. Heaven knows who his father was. He may have been a German."

"What is to become of him now?"

"The sergeant-major you saw me speaking to has his orders. The boy will be kindly treated, as he was before, given money for the pictures, or whatever the place they go to is, and then he will be followed. To-morrow we shall know who his confederate is—probably a woman. You won't see the little brute again, or the old lady either. And that's that.

"And now let's talk about ourselves. I have an exciting bit of news for you. A fortnight ago my wife died—died suddenly in the sanatorium where she has been confined so long—so now . . ."

He had me in his arms again and wouldn't let me go. The supreme ecstasy of those moments! The joy of knowing that now nothing need separate us. We could become man and wife on the first opportunity. There would be no need to let an interval elapse after his wife's death, for few people knew

he had a wife. Most of his acquaintances believed him to be unmarried, or a widower.

Now that she was dead he told me more about her, and of the misery he had endured during the time they had lived together. At the time of their marriage she had already seemed rather "queer." Yes, it had all been a terrible mistake.

Well, I would make it up to him now. The war must be nearing its end. One heard that on all sides. The enemy were at last getting worn down. The fresh troops they were bringing up were many of them quite old, judging by the prisoners. Only the Russians in Germany still had the fighting spirit in them. And our blockade had had its effect. In addition more and more American troops were pouring into France, all young and strong and tremendously keen to fight. It was said, too, that an offensive on a mammoth scale was being planned by Foch, an offensive so gigantic that Germany must this time be crushed out of existence.

But we didn't want to think about the war now, and we tried not to. Rupert might have to leave Abbeville suddenly, so we determined to make the most of our time as long as we were together. Our love and passion for each other seemed to have increased, if that were possible. They knew about it in Abbeville, of course. The men laughed, but some of the women drivers and hospital nurses pretended to be shocked, and would look at me askance when I passed, or deliberately look the other way, or stare straight at me and cut me. Yet nothing could distress or annoy me. We should soon be married. What bliss that thought afforded me!

Another letter from my sailor brother. It hinted at news which I had not heard—that many ships had been sunk, some the enemy's, some ours. The hospital ship, *Guildford Castle*, had been torpedoed. I had a friend nursing in that ship.

Soon afterwards we heard that the Germans had launched a big attack along fifty miles of front beginning near Croiselles, and that we had been driven back. There had been a great onslaught at Vimy Ridge; roads leading to Amiens had been blown to pieces; our supply of ammunition delayed. Depressing, but the talk of Foch's coming blow continued, and it helped to reassure us.

Then came the order that Rupert had expected. He had to leave at once.

Our last night together—and another parting. How long would it be for this time? Now that we were free to marry our parting seemed even more heart-breaking. But perhaps when we met again the world would be at peace.

I was glad to get my own orders about a week later, for Abbeville, now that Rupert had gone, I found intolerable. I was to report at a village I had never heard of—its name I have forgotten—and there would be more ambulance work. From that I knew that the village must be somewhere near the line. It was. It was behind Passchendaele. I had not thought that women would be allowed near there.

I suppose the horrors of that attack and the withdrawal from Passchendaele were as frightful as any I had been near. Partly because the losses were so rapid and on so huge a scale, but also because the

whole affair was apparently suicidal. Troops came pouring up, and pouring up, and still pouring up, and we saw them disappear in their thousands in the direction of Passchendaele amid the never-ending thunder and lightning of the guns which kept the air in an unceasing and vibrating roar. And as rapidly as they went up they would be brought back—what was left of them—mangled masses of blood, bits of men, limbs missing, groaning bodies with intestines visible, sometimes khaki shapes that screamed like maniacs when the stretchers were lifted out. Indeed, it was all worse, much worse than the scenes I had witnessed previously.

I have said I had thought I was case-hardened to spectacles of that description, but I discovered that I was not. Or were my worn-out nerves giving way at last? I seemed again to be living in a dream, suffering from hallucinations, enduring a monstrous and apparently unending nightmare. I heard people speak to me, but their words were meaningless. They seemed to talk some tongue I could not understand. And often their voices sounded a long way off.

We were told later that British casualties alone during those few weeks exceeded 300,000. How many men were killed in the Boer War that my father used to talk about when I was a small child? Surely not nearly so many.

Of course there came a shortage of M.O.'s, and everybody in England with a smattering of surgery, who could be spared, was rushed out to France. We heard that in Base hospitals the seriously wounded had sometimes to be nursed by the less seriously

wounded. There was a shortage of ambulances too, so that other army transport was requisitioned and civilian transport was commandeered. Frequently the pillows, and even the blankets, would be stolen from our ambulances, for which we were held responsible. Heaven knows who the curs were who did a thing like that.

Always, since I had first seen them in action, those enormous guns had frightened me. Somehow I could not dispel from my imagination the foolish idea that they were alive, that they were some sort of inhuman monsters or devils who revelled in spreading death and devastation and all horrors. I have since been told that some of our war victims of insanity imagined that too, suffered from delusions and racking dreams which showed them guns in fantastic and living shapes terrorizing, terrifying and in other ways mentally torturing them. And I can believe it was so, for had I become insane—and more than once I thought I should—my mental tortures would, I know, have taken those awful forms.

Human endurance has its limit, and the limit of my endurance came during that Passchendaele butchery—guns, rifles, bombs, grenades, mine explosions, tanks, liquid fire, poison gas, when men became casualties much faster than the ticking of a clock.

I broke down, and was taken away, exactly how or when I have no recollection, for everything became a blank suddenly. I came gradually to consciousness in a billet far behind the lines, though not out of sound of the carnage. Gwen was with me.

How she came to be there I did not know, or where she came from; yet I know that I owe my life to her. She nursed me back to comparative health, saved my reason too, I firmly believe. If ever there was a ministering angel, Gwen was one.

CHAPTER XIX

Day and night she watched me, nursed me, sat by me during my delirium. She found drugs and special food for me, how and where she never told me. I think she must have " won " them, the army word for pilfering or stealing. When at last I got better I asked her what I had talked about during those periods of delirium, but she would not tell me. All she would say was that my illness had taught her much more about me than she had known before—or suspected. Then she would laugh, and her laughter was infectious.

When fit to report for duty, I heard there had been strange happenings amongst the women workers. Friction, quarrels with superiors, almost a mutiny. Some had voluntarily thrown up their work. Others had been sent home. A woman in high authority had caused all the trouble, apparently. Too overbearing. Too autocratic. That was what they said. Men can bear being bullied by superior officers. Women cannot. They will do anything in reason that they are asked to do, no matter how irksome or distasteful or even dangerous. But women rebel against commands. " Ours not to reason why " was not written by a woman. We want to know the " reason why," particularly when ordered to do what is obviously the wrong thing. Eventually the truth was discovered, and the cause of all the trouble relieved of her authority.

Again I began to wonder what had become of Rupert. Since we had parted in Abbeville I had no news of him, and the doings since then had been so terrible. Had he been mixed up in that carnage? I hardly dared to think. General Foch was now in supreme command, which seemed to please everybody—English, French, Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, Americans. I met men of all those nations at about that time, and one and all had only praise for Foch as a man, an organizer, a commander and a splendid soldier.

"We shall get through *now*," was the phrase one heard on all sides.

At the Bases—also at home, I was told—the hatred of everybody for the enemy was intense. Among our fighting men this hatred was less pronounced, if it existed. The men engaged in the fighting had, I believe, a sort of secret respect for the enemy, for their courage and cleverness. Also for their dogged perseverance in the face of what were fast becoming overwhelming odds. The German prisoners were sullen and resentful. The Austrian were not. The latter—those among them with whom I talked—were quite polite and seemed to be glad to be prisoners—almost happy at being captives. They were ready enough to talk, and it interested me to listen to them. With the German prisoners, however, I made little headway.

Not until after the unparalleled massacre of (I think) March and April, 1918, did that horrible smell—the battlefield smell—one had been forced to endure from time to time, and that I have already spoken of, sweep over northern France and many

miles behind the lines. I imagine it to have been made up of the exhalation of putrescent water, stale poison gas, and the effluvia of dead bodies. It was revolting, sickening. It got into one's inside, so that one remained conscious of it even in one's sleep. It penetrated everything—clothing, blankets; one's very body reeked of it. Nor could one grow accustomed to it as one could to other things—things which crawled and stuck. I saw some hydraulically pressed blankets supposed to be vermin-proof "come alive" when pulled apart.

Most writers of war reminiscences have been content to portray the bloodshed horrors of the battlefields. Some have seemed to revel in describing those atrocities. They have barely mentioned that odious smell, the dirt and vermin, the hungry rats, the stinking mud, the blinding, stifling dust. Yet women of refinement accustomed, before the war, to beautiful surroundings and luxurious living, faced it all willingly, endured it without complaining. The war, I confess, made me prouder of my sex than I had ever been before. And the better bred those women were, the greater their fortitude and the stronger their self-control. Those inclined to grumble were almost always of coarser fibre.

One thing the war did for the women who went through it: it made them—with some exceptions—singularly tolerant. Many even of those County women who before the war I had rather despised because they seemed so banal and provincial and self-centred, I grew to admire and respect. For only then did I realize that their upbringing and their environment had been largely to blame for their stupidity and

their selfishness. Pulled up by the roots from their native soil and replanted in the middle of the war area, they gradually developed an entirely changed mental attitude. They saw what others did, and set to work to do the same. The feeling of contempt they had entertained for those slightly beneath them socially, also for what are called the lower classes, vanished completely. That astonished me. I had imagined such a change to be impossible.

Four years of war. It was difficult to believe that the four had not been eight or ten, or more. Those peaceful days in the Midlands when one had lived for amusement and to kill time seemed to date back to one's infancy. How dreadful that one could have existed like that when there was so much to be done in the world. The war turned one topsy-turvy, altered one's whole outlook on life. I felt I could never be "pre-war" again. None of us ought ever to have been like that. But in those days one had not known, or even suspected.

One night I awoke suddenly. I thought someone had called to me. I struck a match and looked at my watch. Just half-past two. I heard the call again and knew that I had not been dreaming. Rupert's voice. I was certain of that.

My heart beat faster. I could hear it thumping. Rupert! Where was he? Why had he called to me? What was happening? What had happened?

My body became moist with perspiration. I had lit the candle at my bedside, and I sat up and stared about me and at the shadowed corners of the little room. Then I listened. Would he call again? I hoped he would, and yet . . .

If he called again I should believe the worst.

He must be in danger, I told myself, or he would not have called to me. I looked again at my watch and noted the hour.

Miles away the guns rumbled, making my window rattle. My illness had left its effect; I felt weak, weary and depressed. What if those lovely days and nights were the last we should ever spend together? What if I were never to see Rupert again? Oh, life would be unbearable. I should have to end it that I might rejoin him.

Then I pulled myself together. No—not that. That would be to act the coward—only cowards and the mentally afflicted took their lives, Rupert had once said to me. Alive or dead, he would hate to think me a coward. And everybody in this war had been so brave.

But I could not get to sleep again. That voice had awakened me too thoroughly. At dawn I got up and dressed and went out.

A gorgeous sunrise, as most summer sunrises were in France. Some way down the road troops were clambering into lorries, complete with arms and equipment. On the word of command the drivers set their engines going. Another word of command and the lorries lumbered away along the road. In that direction lay the trenches. Mechanically I watched the lorries disappear. More fodder for the guns.

But it was only a temporary distraction. At the back of my mind lay the thought of that voice I had heard. I knew that I should get no rest before I had news of Rupert, no mental peace.

Later that day I was detailed to meet nurses coming up the line. Others were going home on leave. Some of the latter, I was told, had not had leave for three years and had now been ordered by the M.O. to go home and rest.

The first to come out of the railway station was the golden-haired girl who had been matron in the hospital to which I had reported on my first arrival in France, in 1914. The moment she saw me she rushed forward and actually fell upon my neck; she was that sort, temperamental, emotional.

"You perfect darling!" she exclaimed, to the astonishment and I think disgust of her colleagues. "Fancy meeting you again after all this while! How wonderful you are looking! More beautiful than ever. You were 'the lovely creature' to us—don't you remember?"

Then she told me all that she had done during the past years, and her language while she told me was as unrestrained and exaggerated as it had been when she had appointed me her second in command. She showed me, among other things, a letter from a Very High Personage expressing his satisfaction at and his gratitude for "the splendid way you have worked and the exceptional ability you have displayed . . ."—I remember the exact words. That had pleased her enormously, and she kept on referring to it.

"You look different, somehow," she said suddenly, looking me up and down critically.

She paused, and stared me in the eyes.

"B——," she said in a low tone, suddenly serious, "I have not been a nurse for nothing.

Tell me the truth. You may as well, because I already know it. You are no longer the 'little Puritan' as we used to call you."

I couldn't feel annoyed with her, though I wanted to. She was so natural and frank and outspoken.

"What if I am not?" I said—I could think of nothing else to say.

"Only that I am sorry, B——. I've given up that sort of thing. I fell in love—really in love—and the beast let me down. Worse than that—he threatened to report me if I didn't pay him money."

"You surely didn't pay him!" I exclaimed.

"I had to. It would have been too awful to be sent home in disgrace. And I should have been had he done what he threatened to. Yes, I've had enough of men—though I have to nurse them, it's my job."

She had been in several Base hospitals and knew the scandal about everybody. Her talk, though it amused me, reminded me of pre-war provincial gossip and tittle-tattle, though it lacked the sting of most provincial gossip. She had stories about the lady—of whom everybody seemed to have heard—whose war work was a mystery but who arrived at a Base always on the date a certain famous general was due to arrive; and disappeared as soon as he was gone.

The number of interesting happenings not allowed to be reported in the newspapers was remarkable. When the King visited the troops in France a shell exploded exactly where he had been standing not five minutes before. Nobody at home ever heard about that. I suppose there was always the fear in England that news of that nature might create a

scare—but would it have done so? I think not. The only happenings which created a scare in England were the air raids. Even then the only folk really terrified were the poorer classes who, when the alarm sounded, flocked like frightened sheep to take cover in the tube railway stations. I was in London during only two air raids, and those frantic people tearing headlong for the underground stations were pathetic to watch. It never occurred to them to think what would happen in the event of a panic underground; and it would have needed little to start a panic amongst a crowd in that highly-strung state.

Though I saw more of temporary officers than of officers of the regular army—comparatively few regular officers were left after the first eighteen months of the war—a point which struck me was that whereas the regulars always obeyed orders to the letter, the temporaries frequently did not, particularly orders which they knew were bad orders and ought therefore not to have been given. I know that on several occasions disasters were averted through temporary officers having disregarded an order and used their own judgment. And as nothing succeeds like success, the acts of disobedience were intentionally overlooked. The temporaries could afford to take risks of that description. As one of them said to me when we chanced to speak of this—"Soldiering's not my job; if I ever should get court-martialed it wouldn't ruin my career. With the regulars it is different. If I were a regular officer I'd obey orders to the letter, come what might."

Not being descended from soldier stock, I may be biased in favour of civilians. Against the

regular officer I wish to say no word—he was a first-rate soldier and I am sure a splendid fighter. Yet I am bound to say that the temporaries with whom I came in contact were for the most part more tactful and generally more intelligent. They could, too, see most questions from both sides; usually the regulars could see things from their own side only. I remember—to give a small example of what I mean—a corporal being severely punished for outstaying his leave without permission. His excuse when he returned two days late was that his wife was dying—she had just died.

"And did it not occur to you to telegraph and explain the circumstances and give the name and address of your wife's doctor, and ask if your leave might be extended?" his company commander (a regular officer) inquired rather nastily.

It did not occur to him (I feel sure it would have occurred to a temporary officer) that a long telegram from England would have cost at least ten or twelve shillings, and that perhaps the corporal had not the money—which happened to be the case.

Many similar instances of lack of acumen among some of the regular officers I could give if space allowed.

Once or twice during the past years my father's old friend at whose instigation I had become a V.A.D. had written to me. His first letter had come some weeks after the death of his friend, Lord Roberts. I had heard from him, too, soon after my father's death. Now I heard from him again.

It was one of those kindly-worded letters, quite free from "gush," yet straight from the heart, which

only nice old men seem to be able to compose. He had heard of my illness—he did not say from whom—and I gathered from the letter that he was anxious about me. I had been abroad long enough, he said; I had "more than done my bit." The war must end soon, whichever side won. If I liked to come home now he would look on it as a favour if I would accept his hospitality "such as it was," for as long as I liked—the longer the better. That was how he put it.

The temptation to accept was great. I saw before me those peaceful pastures stretching away to the home covers, where, as a girl in my teens, I had sometimes accompanied the guns. How in those days I had hated seeing the pheasants crumple up and drop with a dull thud or go crashing into the underwood and bracken. And how I had loathed seeing a fox broken up or dug out after a glorious run—during which fox and all else had been for the time forgotten. Again I saw the fine old mansion with its well-appointed staff—much less well-appointed now, no doubt—and remembered the happy days I had spent there with my father—those cheery house parties—my coming-out ball which the old man had insisted must take place in his house and nowhere else. . . .

To stay there would revive pleasant memories. The temptation to get away from the bestiality and bloodshed which had surrounded me so long, and find myself once more in congenial and civilized surroundings, was almost irresistible.

Then I thought of Rupert. What would he say if I didn't "stick it out," as most of the girls said

they meant to do? He might disapprove, and I would not for worlds incur his disapproval. Even if he advised me to accept the invitation—supposing I were to be able to find out what he thought—I felt that secretly he would feel keen disappointment.

That dream? Though so vivid—yes, it must, after all, have been a dream—that dream had passed almost right out of my thoughts. There was another thing, however, a very serious thing, which had to be considered. What if, after all . . . I was not quite certain yet . . . sometimes I dreaded that after all it might be going to happen. . . .

Well, my dear father's old friend, fond of me though I knew him to be, had religious and rigid views. The shock of horror it would give him to be told, supposing it happened . . . and his elderly unmarried sister who had shared his home for years and had never cared much about me. . . .

No, the invitation must then and there be declined.

I would make some plausible excuse—my C.O. could not spare me; we women had still much work to do; with fighting all along the line ambulance drivers were badly needed; any excuse of that nature would suffice, for I knew that the old man would believe anything I told him. He would be pleased, too, in a way. He had been so anxious that I should do my bit. He would be gratified to know that I was still anxious to carry on in spite of all that I had gone through.

CHAPTER XX

We were in August, 1918. At no previous period had the joint offensives of the allies been so terrific—or the offensives of the enemy. We heard that General Byng's attack north of the Ancre had resulted in the capture of Beaucourt, Ablainzeville, Bucquoy, Meyermeville, Courcelles and other positions; that we had recaptured Albert—I wondered if the enemy had wreaked their vengeance on it since the happy hours I had spent there with Rupert; that we had secured over five thousand prisoners; that the French had captured Roye and Noyon; that the enemy were beginning to retreat. . . . These details I find I noted down.

And so once more our spirits began to rise. Faces looked less strained. Eyes rather less anxious. The end must be close at hand now, everybody said. The tanks were helping enormously . . . the allies would be victors . . . actually our women were beginning to talk about what they would be doing in a few weeks' time, back in their old homes.

A few weeks! The agony was to last for another few months.

But though our spirits rose, our nerves were still badly frayed. For over a year most of us had grown more and more irritable—peevish, snappy. It came from the prolonged mental strain. One could hardly say anything to anybody without receiving a retort

that was acid or cynical. I was as bad as anybody, worse than some in that respect. And the men the same, the officers, I mean. To fight against it was useless, so we gave up trying—just let ourselves go.

Let ourselves go in other ways, too. Girls who had controlled their desires during all the time they had been in France, now lost control. And made no secret of it. They grew to be different, and that difference was reflected in their faces. The very expressions of some of them changed. Two, three, four years of bestial war turned women, virtuous to the verge of prudery, into creatures lacking all restraint, all sense of proportion. Some, who had been religious, underwent a transformation—spoke mockingly of religion and all that had to do with it. I heard some in the intensity of their emotional transition and the feverish condition of their nerves, say things that were horribly blasphemous. I hated that. Lack of moral sense is in the nature of mental disease. Blasphemy is not. Actually it shocked me.

Obviously things could not go on as they were. A crisis must come, and it came sooner than I expected. If you rub wood long enough you will get fire (it is said). And so the quickly increasing friction burst at last into flame. For no apparent reason a sort of mutiny broke out. It started when an Irish girl flew into a passion on being found fault with by a superior officer—threatening to strike her.

At once the spirit of rebellion spread. The girls—some of them—refused to obey orders. Their being put virtually under arrest inflamed their friends, who split themselves into little cliques. A small clique supported authority. The rest opposed it. Then the

cliques began to quarrel one with another, violent quarrels. The pent-up feelings of everybody had at last found vent.

But suddenly the iron hand of authority struck them. Half a dozen were sent back to England. Another group was confined to camp. A third was severely reprimanded. Four girls were called to orderly room and addressed in person by a High Authority who had appeared unexpectedly—addressed behind closed doors. They had gone in with heads up, jaws set, fire in their eyes, splendidly defiant. They were not going to be dictated to, ordered to do this and that, "bullied like lodging-house slaveys," as one of them prettily put it.

They remained behind those closed doors for over half an hour. I happened to be passing as they came out. Their eyes no longer flamed. They no longer looked defiant or even held their heads up. Two were in tears.

What had been said to them we never found out. It must have been something serious, for from then onward there were no further signs of "rebellion." Peace, comparatively speaking, reigned among the women drivers, V.A.D.'s, canteen attendants and others.

A remark which I happened to overhear amused me. Two colonels who had come up from some Base were having an *apéritif* in an *estaminet*.

"At one time," one of them was saying, "I used to control cowboys on a Mexican *estancia*. I admit I found them a stiff proposition, but by comparison with these . . . women . . . damme . . . I'd like to flog the lot!"

He caught sight of me, lowered his voice, and I heard no more.

Day after day prisoners came tramping through the village—dirty, footsore, with torn uniforms encrusted with mud, many of them capless. Thin, most of them, dejected, worn-out, utterly miserable. Our Tommies gave them cigarettes. The Americans gave them cigars, pipe tobacco and chewing gum. Though not sentimental, I felt sorry for them. I knew that they must loathe this war just as we loathed it, and be longing to get home again just as we were longing to.

Then, as they went on filing past, I wondered how our prisoners were being treated. One had heard awful stories of the enemy's barbarity; Lord Denbigh and others had addressed the troops on this very subject and drawn fearful verbal pictures of the enemy's brutality. But probably, I reflected, the enemy had harrowed the feelings of *their* troops with similar descriptions of British inhumanity.

Inhumanity! Well, again and again I saw camps prepared for the reception of German and Austrian prisoners, and camps prepared for the reception of our own troops. Without exception the former were luxurious by comparison with the latter.

And still I was without news of Rupert. Several months had passed since I had heard from him. Never before had he been so long silent. Anxiety for his safety seized me once more. I seldom saw a newspaper or any list of casualties. He might be wounded and in hospital. But if that were so he surely would have let me know, provided he knew my whereabouts. He had known my whereabouts

before, followed my movements. But perhaps that was now no longer possible. By some means or other I must get news of him. In conversation with officers passing through the village, or reporting there, I made inquiries as tactfully as I could. None of them had heard the name. Yes, they had met officers of his regiment, and of his battalion . . . but almost daily changes took place . . . so many had been wounded, so many killed. A captain in his regiment had been sent home wounded. The captain who had replaced him had been wounded next day, and both had found themselves in the same hospital ship bound for Blighty.

" Funny, wasn't it? " added my informant.

I didn't think it " funny." Our sense of humour differed.

I met Gwen on my way back to my billet after being told that " funny " story.

" My heaven, Connie," she exclaimed, " what on earth's the matter? You do look down in the mouth. Why, darling, I believe you are going to cry! "

Tactless little idiot! I felt I would like to slap her, and I told her so pretty sharply. Because just then I did very badly want to cry. I was going back to my billet for no other reason than to lock the door and throw myself on my bed and cry my eyes out for a while.

My retort had hurt her. I saw that at once, and was seized with remorse. That I should have rapped out at her like that after the way she had nursed me and all that she had done for me. . . .

" Gwen," I said, " forgive me—forget what I said. I know I look down in the mouth—and I do want

to cry. I am feeling so rattled and my nerves are all on edge. I have not had news of Rupert for I don't know how long, and I've just been told that any number of officers in his battalion have been wounded or killed, one after another."

She took my hand and came with me to my billet. As we sat together on the bed she suddenly said:

"I have not told you my news. You worry about uncertainties and meet trouble half-way. If you suffered as I am suffering I believe you would go mad."

That brought me to my senses.

"You?" I exclaimed. "Oh, Gwen, I am sorry. What are you suffering from? What is your news? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I heard it only to-day. Reggie has been blinded. I was coming to tell you when we met. *Reggie has been blinded.*"

"Reggie! You mean . . ."

"Yes," she interrupted. "Reggie F——, the boy you introduced to me when I told you—well, I needn't remind you. I told you afterwards that he had promised to marry me, and you laughed and said they all said that, or something of the sort. It was true, he was going to marry me. . . ."

She almost choked, then added:

"Now he will probably try to break it off—but now I love him more than ever and he will need me more than ever, so I am applying for leave at once, and if I get it I shall try to go home in the same boat and look after him. And as soon as possible I will make him marry me."

Brave little soul. I put my arms round her and

hugged and kissed her and did all I could to soothe her; for as she stopped speaking she had broken down completely and the tears were streaming down her face. What a wretch I had been to speak to her like that.

A peremptory order came through—why were army orders always so peremptory? I was to report elsewhere. There was severe fighting not many miles away, at Cambrai, it was said, in which the Canadians had joined forces with the English. I was to take charge of an ambulance convoy.

The order left me cold. Even a few months ago it would have thrilled me to some extent. But I was sick to death of the whole bloody business; all I longed for was dear old England—and Rupert. I didn't want to see more of the senseless butchery; I never wanted to see any of it, for that matter, though a year or two ago I had foolishly wanted to see something of "what was going on up there." What an age ago that seemed. And how listless I now felt. Then I remembered with a pang that I might at this moment be living peacefully in the delightful old Tudor house in the heart of the Midlands, near my old home, had I accepted my father's friend's offer of hospitality.

I found that the small town I was sent to resembled most of the little towns of the same size that I had seen. The task of inspecting ambulances and attending to my engines and making sure that the girls I was in charge of had all the gadgets prescribed by regulations had become mechanical. These drivers were strangers to me, so, as usual, I paraded them, asked them their names, and instructed

them in their duties—though knowing full well that such instruction was superfluous. For every driver under my charge within the past eighteen months or more I had found to be thoroughly efficient and aware of all that she was expected to do. The duds had long ago all been weeded out.

It is curious that though the war destroyed in many of us our faith in religion, it did not destroy our superstitions; rather, it strengthened our belief in them.

Many a time I saw men as well as women blow out a match after lighting two cigarettes with it, though a third cigarette remained to be lit. The sight of crossed knives on the mess table actually upset some of our girls. And when one day a squint-eyed man looked out of a window, some of them clutched their thumbs inside their fists until they had passed out of his sight. All very childish, particularly when you remember the serious proposition we were up against, but I suppose that nothing will ever stamp out superstitions. As I write, there is a woman in London manufacturing mascots for cars, for which she charges never less than twenty-five guineas. For as long as the car has her mascot attached to it the driver cannot, she declares, meet with an accident through collision or in any other way. She has many clients, not all of them women.

What makes me think of all this now is that just before my convoy was due to start, a charming-mannered Roman Catholic *padre* spoke a few words to each driver, then handed to each a medal, begging her to wear it always. It would "shield

them from danger," he solemnly declared. We accepted the medals, of course, for there could be no doubt that the *padre* meant well and honestly believed that his mascots would protect us. I believe I have mine still.

From what I saw of the many men I nursed in hospitals I think that the "other ranks" were less superstitious than their officers, except the Irish. The Irish were by far the most superstitious of any. Some of them almost mutinied when ordered to board a leave ship which they knew had on board a dead parson.

The fighting at Cambrai was a repetition of the fighting I had seen (from a distance) on and off during the past two years. Except that more tanks were used than ever before. There was the same deafening racket, the same stench, the same display of hideous wounds and mangled bodies, the same feverish non-stop surgical work of the M.O.'s, and the same self-sacrifice on the part of nurses, who were on duty day and night almost without a check.

What greatly impressed me was the amazing fortitude displayed by the Canadians, of whom I saw probably more then than I had seen at any previous time. Their language was occasionally lurid; they used adjectives and oaths which I had never heard before—I don't want to hear them again. But their marvellous self-restraint while M.O.'s operated upon some of them without an anæsthetic served as a lesson to us all—women as well as men—in downright stoicism.

And their consideration and their thoughtfulness! It was astonishing. They thought more about us

than about themselves, were so anxious to spare our feelings—what feelings we had left. Yet many were rough fellows who had spent their lives, as one of them aptly put it, "right up against stark Nature." We hear talk at times about "the instincts of a gentleman." Those fellows had the true instincts of Nature's gentlemen—which are the soundest instincts of all.

CHAPTER XXI

STORIES of British victories began to come in almost daily, but with our experience of inaccurate, exaggerated, or entirely false reports, we received them with caution. Cambrai had been taken and Le Cateau too—that we knew. There were rumours also of naval victories and sea tragedies.

The first trustworthy news of a recent sea tragedy that reached me came about a fortnight later, in a letter from my brother Lionel. I had not heard from him for months.

"You have of course heard," his letter began, "of the sinking of the mail steamer, *Leinster*, off the coast of Ireland, and the loss of over four hundred lives; but it is possible you do not know that I was on board her.

"My dear Connie, it was the most thrilling adventure of my life, but I hope never to repeat such an experience. We had not been long out from Dublin, when the *Leinster* was hit by two torpedoes and at once began to sink rapidly. There was no panic, and of course we all had our safety jackets, so as soon as the boats were full everybody else began jumping into the sea or sliding down ropes.

"The submarine made no attempt to save any of us; it had submerged again at once. I managed to reach a bit of floating wreckage, and I clung to it and it kept me from sinking. But the water was frightfully cold. Some of the lifeboats were over-

loaded, and all round me people in the water were crying out for help and imploring the boat people to save them.

"Not far from me a boy and a girl had hooked their hands on to the side of a boat and kept on begging the men in her to rescue them. This was one of the overloaded boats, and a major sat in the stern holding a revolver and swearing at them, and shouting that if either tried to clamber in he would shoot them both dead. The girl was quite pretty, a Canadian, and she was actually able to laugh and to call insulting things at the major. Rather wonderful, don't you think? Particularly as one of her arms was broken—she had broken it by falling on some wreckage when she let go the rope she was sliding down into the sea. She looked not much over twenty, and the man, who turned out to be her husband, was only a little older—a captain in the A.S.C. Again and again he implored the major to let his wife get into the boat, but it was no good.

"I was in the water for well over an hour, I should say, and all the time the captain and his wife clung to the boat, she with one hand only, he with one arm round her and supporting her. I could see they were getting too exhausted to hold on much longer, particularly the girl, when suddenly a huge wave capsized the boat, so that some moments later all the men who had been in it were struggling in the water.

"I let go my bit of wreckage and swam to the overturned boat and managed to scramble on to her and clutch hold of the keel. The captain and his wife also hung on to the boat, and one or two others. The major who had held the revolver tried to, but failed, and was drowned. We must have remained like that at least half an hour longer before we were all rescued. . . .

"Well, Connie, that captain and his wife and I

presently found ourselves in the same hospital. Their name is M——, and they come from Vancouver and were going back there. They have been married only a short time, and the pluck of both of them, particularly Mrs. M——, was really wonderful. . . . So I have had my adventure after all, you see. I have quite recovered now and feel none the worse. I was going on leave, and am on leave now and in London, as you see. . . ."

He went on to tell me a lot more about himself, and then wrote, "and how are you getting on, Connie? . . . And what is this rumour about you and some blithering officer being in love or engaged to be married or something? Nothing in it, I suppose—and I hope . . ." and so on and so on.

Then he had a lot to say about his C.O. on the Curragh, where for months he had been stationed, "and the C.O.'s perfectly charming wife and her equally charming unmarried sister. . . ." His C.O.'s name was A——, Colonel A——, whom he described as "a wonderfully capable little Lancashire man—in private life head of some big manufacturing concern, I believe."

Apparently his C.O. and his C.O.'s wife had taken a fancy to him—he said they had—for several times they had invited him to their house to play tennis and shown him hospitality. But Lionel had not been adjutant while on the Curragh, and that he greatly regretted. "To be adjutant gives one such a good standing . . ." was one of his absurd remarks. Finally he hoped that "this jolly old war" would end soon, as he was "fed up with it and longing to get back to the stage." He had been acting a good

deal in "shows" while in Ireland, and added, "they all think no end of my playing."

So that was my brother—Lionel. The only shirker in the family had managed to scrape through the war so far with a whole skin, "a blessed Providence must have guarded me all along," he had the effrontery to say. Then why had "a blessed Providence" not guarded poor brave Henry and Tom? The letter annoyed me intensely. Lionel was as self-satisfied and insufferable as ever, with his conceit and smugness, his tennis and his play-acting. Why, for him the war could have been little more than a sort of picnic or jamboree, with, I had not a doubt, lots of pretty girls to make love to—quite a lot had been there during my time on the Curragh.

It was during the fighting at Cambrai that I witnessed one of the most distressing of the many distressing sights that I beheld during the war. One of the wounded in my ambulance went suddenly mad—raving mad. He could not have been over twenty, and he looked about eighteen; he must have been at school when war broke out. He sat up all at once and began crying for his mother—"Oh, mummy, mummy, come to me—mummy, I want you so . . ." His voice was suddenly like a child's. Then he began to scream, and when he tried to utter words they were all jumbled up and impossible to make head or tail of. I don't think that anything during the whole of the war upset me more than that—it was so pathetic, so heart-rending. Tears poured down my face as I drove along as quickly as I dared—I was the leading ambulance of the convoy, so could set the pace we travelled at. I wanted to get out of ear-

shot of those dreadful screams by reaching the casualty clearing station in the shortest possible time. The boy was an officer, and I discovered his name. Afterwards, in England, I found out where his home was and—I don't know quite why—I called at his home. He had, as I suspected, been an only child, and worshipped by his parents. Their gratitude at my having come to tell them about him exceeded all bounds; anything I had asked them then I believe they would have done for me. I did not, of course, tell them the truth. Their son had died in hospital (fortunately) some days later, and he had not, I assured them, suffered much. His end, I told them, had been peaceful. I trust they will never read these lines. If they do, I hope they will forgive me. All I wanted was to save them pain so soon after their son's death.

Everywhere now there was more and more talk of peace. All along the line the enemy was giving way. The French occupied Laon. The British occupied Ostend. General Plumer had captured Comines and Halluin and Werviecq and nearly two hundred guns. Douai had been taken. A feeling of exhilaration seized us. At last—at long last the end was coming—and the allies would be the victors. There was wild talk of a triumphal march into Berlin. The men told one another that by hook or by crook the Kaiser would be captured, loaded with chains, marched through the streets of Berlin! The Kaiser was the one man they all seemed to detest; next to him in order of detestation came the Crown Prince. Had you told the men that in less than twelve years' time the Kaiser would be writing long articles for the

London newspapers they would have told you that you were "loopy." Had you added that in less than ten years' time Randolph Hearst, the American newspaper king, who throughout the war had been so rabidly pro-German and anti-British, would be entertained at dinner in the biggest hotel in London as the guest of honour of Englishmen of High Position, and that later he would buy a palatial castle in this country, you would probably have been certified insane. Yet those things came to pass.

And all the while, through all this excitement and turmoil, thoughts of Rupert continued to disturb me. Why had he not written? What could have become of him? I had written to a friend in England asking her to look through the newspaper files to find out if his name appeared in any casualty list, and she had replied some days later that she had done so but could not find his name. That cheered me a little. He must be doing intelligence work still, I told myself. And I remembered what Gwen had said about my anticipating trouble and meeting it half-way.

It was towards the end of October that I suddenly collapsed. The M.O. attributed the collapse to war strain, and ordered me home at once.

"Not another hour's work," he said, "or I won't be answerable for the consequences. You must go home to your people and live as quietly as possible. Do nothing. Think of nothing."

He paused, looking at me queerly.

"Have you anything on your mind?" he jerked out.

I lied. I assured him that I had nothing on my mind. Yes, I would "go home to my people," I told him.

My people!

Again we crept out of Havre under cover of night. No lights. Smoking strictly forbidden. The sea was smooth and we travelled at top speed. Like some phantom of darkness we entered Southampton Water.

London had changed again. No doubt now about London's at last realizing that England was in danger. Blackness everywhere. A curious hush. Even the expensive restaurants now rationed their patrons—so far as they dared.

"That bomb what nearly hit the Ritz, and the one in Piccadilly, woke 'em up a bit, miss," said the friendly old waiter at the Berkeley, whom I had known before the war, when I commented on the change. "Pity them bombs didn't come three years ago."

I travelled down to my native county, hired a car in the town, and drove out to the cemetery where my father was buried. Near the lodge of my home on the way back I pulled up. The dear old ivy-grown house looked as friendly as ever. Memories rushed in upon me—happy memories. My childhood. My brothers. My father. And now . . .

How the world had altered. And my life too; how different. I couldn't bear to look long at my old home, and, half-blinded with tears, I jerked the lever of the hired car and soon my home was far behind me.

All I wanted now was news of Rupert. I searched through a file of *The Times*, but found nothing in the casualty lists of the past few months. Never had I

felt so wretched, so lonely. Lonely in London. It seemed incredible, with all the people I had known in London before the war. I tried to find some of them, but they had changed their addresses.

"Do nothing. Think of nothing." How could I? I engaged a couple of rooms on an upper floor in a small hotel in Shaftesbury Avenue, of all places. They overlooked the street and were not quiet. A quiet hotel I felt would be insufferable.

The chambermaid told me that her sister had been a V.A.D. too, in France. Had I met her? I had not, so far as I knew.

Her sister had died "not a twelve-month before," the chambermaid confided to me. "The poor dear—that ill she got—looked much as you do, miss, the last time I see her. I knew then she weren't long for this world. War strain was what the doctor said she 'ad, poor darling. You'll 'ave to be careful, miss. Very careful. You do look bad, you do."

Every day she told me something more about her sister's symptoms just before her death, described her appearance in detail, explained exactly how she had "passed away" and how beautiful she looked in her coffin.

"A lovely corpse she made, miss; everybody said so. Interred at Kensal Green, and a pretty penny the funeral cost me."

Then one day in Dover Street I met an officer I had known in France. He had lost an arm and was no longer in khaki. He insisted on my lunching with him at his club.

"By the way," he said during the meal, "I met a

friend of yours near Pyronne some weeks ago. He was with the Australians. He remembered that I knew you, so he spoke to me about you."

"What was his name?"

"Rupert C."

I had to steady myself. Then I said calmly:

"Oh? How is he?"

"Fit as a fiddle. We had a snack together in his billet. Stout fellow. One of the best. I've seen him do things which deserved the V.C. He and I were at Cambridge together."

I wondered how much he knew. I felt sure that he must know. Yet not by a word or a look did he betray that he knew anything.

My spirits rose. This he noticed, for presently he said, smiling:

"You seem awfully bucked, Miss ——. The war has not done *you* much harm!"

"Bucked at seeing you, of course," I replied quickly. "I am glad we met. I've been back from France over a week and not met a soul I know until I met you. It's dreadfully depressing being alone in London."

"What about your people?"

"My father died some months ago, and I have lost two brothers in the war," I replied. "Those were 'my people.'"

"Good God. I am sorry. I'd no idea."

He looked embarrassed. Then, as he was going, he said:

"Can't we meet again, Miss ——?"

I said I should be delighted. He wanted my address, but I preferred not to give it—I had

discovered my hotel to be none too respectable an establishment. So he gave me his.

On the threshold of his club, as I was leaving, he said quite simply:

"Next time we meet I'll tell you more about Captain C."

So he did know.

CHAPTER XXII

It occurred to me that I ought to give someone my address. Rupert might write to my home address—he had done so before—and at present nobody knew where to find me. One of the women's organizations might want to communicate—perhaps send some official document.

I rang up the lawyers who had acted for my father.

"That you, Miss——?" came the voice of the senior partner when the clerk had put me through to him. "I am glad you rang up. We have been expecting to hear from you."

"Oh?" I said. "What about?"

"The letter we wrote to you."

"I have had no letter from you."

"But we posted one ten days or a fortnight ago—a most important letter. It went to your home address, I remember; we decided to send it there, not knowing your whereabouts in France. Have you been back long?"

I told him, then asked him what was in the letter.

"I would prefer to tell you in person," was his reply. "Can you come here? The sooner the better."

Wondering what it could be that he wanted to see me about and preferred not to speak about by telephone, I drove at once to the office in the City.

Without delay I was shown into his room, where he sat alone. When the door had closed, he looked at me for some moments without speaking.

"I don't know if the information contained in our letter is going to give you a shock, Miss——," he said, breaking the silence. "It contained bad news —but also good news. I believe you were acquainted with a Captain C——, Captain Rupert C of the . . ." he named Rupert's regiment. "I am very sorry to have to tell you that—he is dead. He was shot down whilst flying near St. Mihiel, some weeks ago."

I couldn't speak. I couldn't think. I did not ask him to repeat what he had said. I had heard it too clearly. I just sat there, staring at him stupidly. I seemed to grow cold all over.

In a sort of mist I saw him get up and come to me. Then dully, I heard him say:

"I'll be back in a moment."

He went out of the room and returned with a glass of brandy, which he made me swallow.

"I know it is very terrible, Miss ——, but everything in this war has been terrible. I lost my only son in 1915, you know."

His hand rested lightly on my shoulder.

That pathetic little reminder about his son seemed to rouse me out of my lethargy. Though I could not yet realize that I should never see Rupert again, that the one and only love of my life had gone from me, that from now onward I should be a lone woman —that reminder struck home. I had thought only of myself—for a long time I had thought only of myself and my future happiness. When I came into this office that had still been the thought uppermost in

my mind. I had forgotten the misery of the thousands on thousands who had lost husbands, fathers, brothers, sons. They had borne their terrible sorrow bravely. I must bear mine bravely.

"Forgive me," I said with an effort. "He was a very great friend of mine and this news has come so unexpectedly. . . . If you have nothing more to say I will go back to my hotel now. . . ."

I tried to rise, but felt too weak to get up. His hand was on my shoulder still, and I remember that even during those moments of intense grief it seemed to soothe me a little.

"But I have more to say, my dear," he said in the kindest tone—he had never before called me "my dear." "I have something more to say—something very important. It may even ease your pain a little—though perhaps only a very little. Believe me, you have my very sincerest and deepest sympathy. Shall I tell you now?"

I nodded.

"Captain C was a very rich man. In a Will he made last year he left you a considerable legacy. After his wife's death he made a fresh Will, bequeathing to you alone everything in the world that he possessed."

That was the last straw. I had just managed to bear up when told of his death. This final proof of his intense love for me overwhelmed me. I broke down completely and burst into uncontrollable tears.

Of what happened after that I have only a confused recollection. I know that the kind old lawyer, who had long been a widower, insisted on driving me back to his own home, in Putney; that there I was

put to bed and attended by his own doctor; and that for some nights a hospital nurse slept in my room. Later on, when convalescent, I was told that I had been delirious and that the doctor had feared that my brain might give way.

I wonder if the misery at losing a loved husband or father or brother or son is as intense as the agony of losing a lover? Heaven knows I had suffered when my father died and when news had come to me of the death of my brothers, but that suffering bore no comparison to the inconceivable torture I endured during those days which followed the news of Rupert's death. The ancient Greeks, I have been told, believed that when a man and a woman fell in love with each other the spirit of each passed into the other, so that if one of them died the spirit of the dead remained in the survivor, causing intense physical as well as mental agony. That, I believe, may be the truth, for never had I suffered or have I suffered since as I suffered then.

When almost quite well again I returned to my hotel, for the manager and the staff were so civil and obliging that I felt at home there. Later came a letter from my mother, who had not been to see me though the lawyer had thought it right that she should be informed of my illness, and of my temporary residence under his roof, also that she should be given my hotel address. Soon afterwards I was inundated with letters from charitable organizations and from strangers congratulating me on my "good fortune" and then setting forth their wants; also with letters from stockbrokers and financiers and speculators all bent on doing me a good turn by investing some of

my fortune for me—the more the better—together with several letters proposing marriage. One and all went into the waste-paper basket.

No, one letter did not. It came from Gwen. She had only just heard of Rupert's death, and about the Will, she said, and she wrote at once to say . . .

I have that letter still, and shall keep it always. It is the kindest, most considerate, most genuinely sympathetic letter I have ever received. She seemed to be able to read my inmost thoughts, to realize with absolute precision exactly what I felt.

And she was married, she told me! She had married her friend who had been blinded—the letter came from his home in Yorkshire. I cannot express the joy I experienced on reading that. My mind went back to that day months ago when she had come to me and exclaimed: "Connie, I want a man most frightfully."

I remembered how taken aback I had been—shocked, even. She wanted a man. Any man—young—middle-aged—old. It didn't matter. And the man I had found for her had been—the right man!

How ironical. That I should have picked the right man for her like that, at haphazard. That my own beloved should have been taken from me on the eve of peace, after all he had gone through, the risks he had run, and the dangers he had escaped during four years. It destroyed whatever faith I had left in Providence. My mother would no doubt have exclaimed piously, had she known: "You may depend upon it, God knows best what is good for all of us."

The hotel management and staff of course knew

about my change of fortune and became, some of them, more polite and obliging than they already were, some obsequious to the verge of servility. The manager "hoped he might be permitted" to congratulate me. His wife, all smirks, "begged leave" to do the same. My chambermaid became suddenly quite cheerful and assured me "there wasn't any lady in the land who better deserved to come into a fortune nor what you do, miss." It was all very gratifying, for it showed me once more the power of money. After that little outburst of emotion she presently went on to tell me that she had just been all the way to Kensal Green to visit her dear sister's grave, which she had found to be terribly neglected—its condition was "something shocking, reelly and trewly, miss." What it needed, I gathered from her talk, was a posh headstone (the adjective she used was far more genteel), but of course poor people like her couldn't afford to give their deceased relatives "no such luxuries" and—well, beggars couldn't be choosers, could they, miss?

Naturally I suggested paying for the headstone. How could I have done otherwise? Besides, "a lovely corpse" deserved a beautiful headstone. Would she like to order it and send me the bill, I asked, or would it suit her better if I handed her the cash?

As I expected, not only would it suit her better to handle the cash, but she thought it would save me the trouble of writing out a cheque and posting it to the tombstones manufacturer.

It was not until later on that one afternoon I chanced to notice a rather striking fur coat proceeding

up Regent Street just in front of me. Something about the slope of the shoulders seemed somehow to be familiar, and as I overtook the coat I cast a quick glance at the profile.

Yes, I had not been mistaken. My chambermaid.

I never saw that posh headstone; but then I have never been to Kensal Green and my chambermaid did not suggest that I should go to see it. Indeed she made no further reference to it after I had given her the money to pay for it. Perhaps there was a residue after it had been paid for . . . or perhaps it occurred to her that, after all, as her sister would never see the headstone . . . or perhaps she decided that the money might be better spent . . . or perhaps . . .

You never know the working of a chambermaid's brain.

Of course Lionel wrote. His letter was more than ordinarily priggish. "His attention had been drawn" to the paragraph . . . "he must say he was astonished. . . . It seemed rather peculiar, didn't it? . . ." Anyway he was "glad for your sake, Connie old thing . . ." and if I would like to do him a good turn there was a wonderful play which could be produced for less than two thousand pounds . . . he had read it himself and it was "a sure winner" . . . he would play the lead if he found the money. . . .

He didn't find it.

One of the first cheques I signed—a very substantial cheque—went to Gwen, a belated wedding-present. She had stood by me through thick and thin—nursed and tended me hand and foot through my first illness

—been so loyal—kept my secret so well—sympathized with and comforted me.

I ought to have been the happiest woman in London —rich, young, good-looking, and normally in excellent health. Probably I should have been but for that tragedy, in spite of the loss of my father and my brothers. Instead I was far from happy. All I had to think about was how best to make use of my very large fortune. I was determined to help all sorts of needy persons, put them on their legs. Indigent gentlewomen in particular I would assist. I had seen so many of them, women of good education brought up in comfortable surroundings and never taught any profitable occupation, left suddenly penniless and of course too proud to solicit aid. I had always felt dreadfully sorry for them. People born poor and brought up in poverty seemed to be looked after by charitable organizations and institutions, even though they chose recklessly to bring a baby into the world every year without caring to think if it would starve or not. And most of the clergy encouraged them to produce children—I had known that before my father and I had discussed that sort of thing. It was almost unbelievable. Yes, I would make the best possible use of the fortune Rupert had left me. Not out of philanthropy. Out of selfishness. Because I knew that to help others was the best way to ensure what happiness there was left for me in the world.

Thinking deeply of all this as I sauntered along the Embankment one morning, I sat down on a bench there to rest. A minute or two later a big policeman approached.

"I wouldn't sit there, miss, if I was you," he said.

"But why not?" I asked in astonishment.

"Well, maybe you've been serving out in France and so don't mind 'em," he replied with a grin.

"What on earth are you talking about?" I said, mystified. Or was he trying to pull my leg?

"Lice, miss. Them big body lice. There's lots on them benches most mornings. Them benches is slept on at night—and not by the likes of you, miss."

But at the word "lice" I had sprung up with a little scream. One had been forced to put up with them in France, sometimes; but I was no longer in France—thank God.

Rupert had taught me never to leave anything to chance, never to use the phrase "it's all right" if there seemed to be a possibility of the matter referred to not being all right.

"Always make sure," he had said to me many a time; and during our trip to Germany, as he had called our flight into the enemy's country, half a dozen overheard words had more than once led to our eventually making some useful discovery.

And so when, after leaving the Embankment, I stood reading the playbills outside a theatre and noticed a man shrug his shoulders and make a grimace of disgust as some little street urchins came along singing our National Anthem—I wondered why the man had done that. Would any patriotic Englishman have shrugged his shoulders and made a grimace like that because he heard the National Anthem being sung, no matter how badly? Particularly at a time like this.

So, though only a tiny incident, it intrigued me.

The man appeared to be waiting for somebody, and while I remained staring at the playbills longer than I need have done, a woman came out of the theatre through a side door. At once the man went up to her and, without raising his hat, spoke to her in an undertone.

I rarely forget a face, and I remembered hers. But where had I seen it before? The two were walking away together, slowly, still in conversation. I followed a little way behind them. That woman. Who was she? Then suddenly I remembered. Shortly before the war I had been in London with my father and he had taken me to supper with some Bohemian friends of his. That woman had been among them and we had talked to each other. She had told me—it all came back to me now—that she was secretary to a music impresario—and yes, she had told me she was German by birth but a naturalized Englishwoman.

Presumably she was employed at the theatre we had just left, as she had come out through a door of the administration. Odd that the man she was now with should metaphorically have spat on the ground on hearing our National Anthem sung.

They walked all the way up to Soho Square, all the time deep in conversation, and went into a house there—a house with offices. I went in too, and walked slowly up the stairs behind them. On the second floor the man unlocked a door with a latch-key, went in, followed by the woman, and shut the door. There was no name on the door. I went on past the door and up to the top of the house, as though looking for some other office—this to allay

any possibility of their suspecting that I was interested in their movements. Then I came down the stairs again and went out.

A taxi was passing and I hailed it.

"Drop me in Whitehall," I said.

I knew Sir —— ——. He was a friend of my father's. I sent in my card with a line written on it that I should like to see him personally on a matter which might be of importance.

Some days later when I came in for lunch at my hotel I found a telephone message written on a scrap of paper. It ran:

"A gentleman rang up at noon to thank you for calling to see him last Wednesday. He says you did quite right. He gave no name, but said you would understand."

That was all. From that day to this I have not seen Sir —— ——. I have often wondered what those two people were about, and what happened to them.

We now daily expected to hear that peace had been proclaimed. Twice already news had come to my hotel that the war was over, but the report had rightly been discredited. All sorts of fantastic stories were being spread—the Kaiser had died suddenly of heart disease; had been assassinated; had committed suicide. Foch or Haig, or both, had ordered all troops to withdraw. The Royal Academy had been bombed from an aeroplane; it had been—over a year ago—and this was the first the public had heard of it, which shows how well the War Office kept some

of its secrets—not all. I wondered who spread all the lies, and why they were spread. Some practical joker, perhaps, for even during the war there existed people with a distorted sense of humour. One of the most outrageous reports—at first widely credited—was that thousands of enemy troops had effected a landing between Blackwater and the Naze, were marching on London, and had already reached Chelmsford!

CHAPTER XXIII

It was Armistice night.

I sat at my window overlooking Shaftesbury Avenue, watching the seething crowd of half-mad revellers surging this way and that, shouting, singing, waving Union Jacks, adding to the pandemonium with rattles and horns and squeaking instruments—some actually letting off fireworks, as though we had not seen enough "fireworks" in France!

I was alone. And being sober I was strangely affected by the curious spectacle. It made me reflect. What proportion of that half-intoxicated crowd had helped in the war in any capacity? Not a big proportion, I felt sure. Probably the noisiest had done least of all. Wedged in the swaying mob—a slowly moving mass of humanity—were women in uniform, but the bulk of the mass was not in uniform.

Then, by gradual degrees, I seemed to inhale the mental "atmosphere" which rose up from the street below, for presently a feeling of restlessness took possession of me. I felt I could no longer stay seated there, calm and alone—a quiet, unemotional, unthrilled observer. Something urged me to get up, to go out and join those wild revellers. I wanted not to—but the "something" dragged me. I tried not to go. . . .

In the downstairs lounge and in every ground-floor room in the hotel were people packed together, beside

themselves. The place was like a Bedlam. I was seized and kissed by men and women, as others were —to have tried to resist would have been useless. The hotel manager, catching sight of me, hoisted me on to his shoulder amid squeals of delight from everybody. It was all horrible—yet somehow on that night one seemed to mind it less. On any other occasion, at any other time, the whole thing would have revolted me and made me want to hide. But my will-power, my self-control, now no longer functioned. I had been swept mentally as well as physically into the frenzied melting-pot of Armistice night.

"For meself, I'm sorry the jolly old war's over," a half-intoxicated youth beside me was shouting into a friend's ear. He waved his glass above his head. "Yes, bloody sorry it's over. Here's to the next —— —— old war!" and he drained his glass.

His sentiment annoyed me as much as his disgusting language.

"What have *you* done in the jolly old war, my lad?" I called to him.

The unexpected question seemed to sober him a little. For some moments he peered at me with bleary, blinking eyes.

"What have *I* done?" he got out at last. "Mor'n *you*'ve done, my pet. For mor'n two years I've been sizin' shells—sizin' shells, hear what I say? Yes, an' gettin' seven quid a week for doin' it. *Seven quid for mor'n two years.* That's why I'm sorry the ruddy war's over, same as you'd be if you was me—see?"

I went into the street. Piccadilly Circus was a solid block of pedestrians and vehicles mixed up. If

nobody was crushed to death that night it was a miracle. Pushed this way and that, jostled, squeezed, only with extreme difficulty was I at last able to board a 'bus and climb on to its top.

And on the top I met a friend face to face. The one-armed captain with whom a few weeks ago I had lunched.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Who'd have thought of meeting you in this *galère*?"

He had nobody with him, he said. And later he insisted on my having supper with him.

"At the club again," he added. "Impossible to get into any restaurant to-night. London once more lit up. Marvellous, isn't it? Worth going through the war to see a sight like this."

During supper he congratulated me on my good fortune. Someone had told him about it, he said.

"Poor old Rupert," he went on. "He must have been dead when we were speaking of him the other day. Great friend of yours, I suppose."

"Oh, for God's sake shut up!" I remember rudely exclaiming. Then I hastily apologized.

"It's I who ought to apologize, Miss ——," he answered quickly. "I was a fool to speak like that. Do please forgive me."

People said the revelry on Armistice night was less intensive than the "Mafeking" on the declaration of peace after the Boer War. That I do not believe to have been possible.

Almost immediately after the Armistice the chief topic of conversation in London—at least among the people I was now meeting—was the fortunes amassed by "the lucky ones." Yes, they called them that.

Comparatively poor men had become rich. Rich men had become enormously wealthy. Many of the latter could not have helped becoming enormously wealthy (had they wanted not to do so), for ship-owners, food contractors, manufacturers of khaki and others had been compelled to cater for the Government. Yet, without a doubt, underhand work was done by a body of men who were determined to make as much money as possible out of the war. I almost got into trouble for accepting an invitation to lunch with a Government contractor with whom I had become acquainted at the Deptford Supply Depôt whilst on leave. Fortunately my C.O. at the time was a woman of intelligence; also fortunately she knew all about me.

"I want to have a talk with you," she said one afternoon. "Come to me at six this evening."

And when we met at six that evening she explained to me the enormity of my "crime." To lunch with or accept hospitality from a contractor, or even from a contractor's representative, was in the eyes of the War Office tantamount to accepting a bribe. She told me of a subaltern who, having thoughtlessly accepted a gift of cigars from an army contractor's representative, had got himself into very hot water indeed.

Those contracts! I could tell some tales about some of them. But even after all these years it might be injudicious.

Yes, I am glad I went through the war. But never again. Never. Never. Nor do I care to dwell upon its memory, as I have had to do whilst writing this book. Since the war I have travelled up and

down the world—I have wandered in North and South America, in China and Japan and the Malay States, in Australia and New Zealand, India and Africa and Arabia, and in Europe. Except in a few of the more uncivilized States of Central Europe, I have found educated people everywhere to be strongly antagonistic to war. Not necessarily on humanitarian grounds. Humanitarianism is at a low ebb in some countries still. But on common sense and practical grounds. They say to one another: "After all, of what use was the Great War? Who but a small section of the world's community benefited by it? It threw the world back a hundred years at least. War is senseless, stupid, unnecessary, and ruinous to every nation involved in it." Yet my opinion—and I have travelled always with my eyes and ears open—is that if we go on telling one another that another war will come, must come, is inevitable—it will come.

During the many months I travelled in the United States I never heard an American declare that America won the war, though, as I have said already, before I crossed the Atlantic I had been assured that I should find all Americans in their own country boasting that it did. And in every country I visited I met men who had fought on one or other of our fronts, and some who had fought against us. They were back in civil life, and though some appeared to have enjoyed the excitement, such as it was—so much of the war was intensely monotonous—not one of them wanted ever to serve in another campaign. Many declared quite frankly that if another war broke out they would stay at home and sell something to a Government!

"Not heroic, miss, I know, but next time we'll let others pull the chestnuts out of the fire," so many of them said, or expressed themselves to that effect.

Among the cowboys of Canada whose villages and camps I stayed in—splendid men, most of them, so courteous and so considerate, they could teach some of our London youths a lesson in that respect—I loved to sit and listen to their stories of the war. What varied and wonderful experiences some of them had had. Cave men to look at many were, rough of speech, yet wholly devoid of nonsense and hypocrisy —sound through and through. If I had a young sister I would sooner let her loose among those cowboys than I would let her loose in many a West End drawing-room, judging by my own experiences here in London.

The war brought about a great revolution in the thoughts and ideas of people in many parts of the world. Yet in our own dear little island there still dwell country folk on whom it made no lasting impression. They sat at home during those four years, and over their teacups chattered about the war; they read the little that was allowed to be published about it in the newspapers; they raised their eyes and registered distress and horror when the casualty lists grew longer and longer; they hoped and prayed that the war might soon end. But they were never in touch with it mentally; they never caught the spirit of the war or allowed it to affect or soften their natures in any way; and when it was all over their outlook on life remained exactly as it had been in pre-war years.

I have revisited the war area only once. After my years of travel I summoned up courage.

I went to see the spot where my beloved lies buried.

He had died about the day I had dreamed that he had called me. Or was it no dream? Can that voice I heard actually have been his?

I went to see places I had known, and battlefields I had known. The battlefields had disappeared. A completely new country-side had spread over the land. I could find no familiar landmark. Not one. And the bombarded towns, what had become of them? Where had these new cities with modern architecture and strange streets sprung from? They looked like enormous toy towns taken out of sawdust and tissue paper and put together.

It was summer. Motor-coaches packed with excursionists rolled along the roads between the rows of tall poplars, and along the white, straight roads beyond them without poplars. Along that dread road where the endless grey snake with the red crosses upon its back had crawled and crawled, hooting cars and *chars-à-bancs* rushed. I stopped my car at Puchevillers and tried to find the site where the hospital tents had stood—the casualty clearing station.

I could not locate it.

And the trenches. Yes, there were trenches. But what trenches! Whitewashed sandbags of cement. Whitewashed bays. Whitewashed duckboards. No mud. No dust. They must clean them daily with vacuum cleaners!

Yes, you can go into those spotless trenches. And you can pick up one of the dummy rifles supplied for the amusement of "visitors to the battlefields,"

and you can stand on the firestep and rest the rifle and pull the trigger and play at being soldiers.

" Look out, Maudie—I'm going to shoot you ! "

Click.

Great fun.

" Oh, Charlie, just look what I've come to—a lovely great dugout ! Let's explore it together."

Blasts on a hooter in the distance. More blasts as it approaches.

" We stop here one hour, ladies and gentlemen. You'll have plenty of time for lunch after visiting the trenches."

Visiting the trenches !

Crowds are " visiting the trenches " as I stand there. Many are young people. There is rough horseplay as they scamper in and out. Squeals of merriment. Occasionally a shriek. Then . . .

" Come along, Florrie, and 'ave yer lunch. We ain't got not too much time. 'Ere, Albert—open this."

A cork pops.

And on this hallowed spot men in their dozens, in their hundreds perhaps, died in agony.

The visitors mean no harm, of course. They just don't think. Perhaps some of them try not to think, as we tried not to think during those years.

They are singing " Tipperary."

My God ! That is more than I can bear. When I hear " Tipperary " I see again those columns marching—marching—marching, singing it in chorus—marching to their death and worse than death, to their agony of gas and mutilation.

Here and there lonely figures—men—women—

middle-aged, old, stand silent. Some of the men have taken off their hats. They, too, are thinking—looking backward. They appear unconscious of the presence of the picnic parties and of the young people playing at being soldiers.

"*En voiture s'il vous plait, mesdames et messieurs.*"

"Our next stopping-place will be Vimy Ridge, where you can have your tea and then . . ."

Herbert Asquith's lines creep into my brain:

"One last salute: the bayonets clash and glisten;
With arms reversed we go without a sound:
One more has joined the men who lie and listen
To us who march upon their burial ground."